

2013 Golden Jubilee edition

BIHAR YOGA®

Volume III

On the Wings of the Swan

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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1963–2013
GOLDEN JUBILEE

WORLD YOGA CONVENTION 2013

GANGA DARSHAN, MUNGER, BIHAR, INDIA

23rd–27th October 2013

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Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Satsangs given at Ganga Darshan, Munger, 1995.



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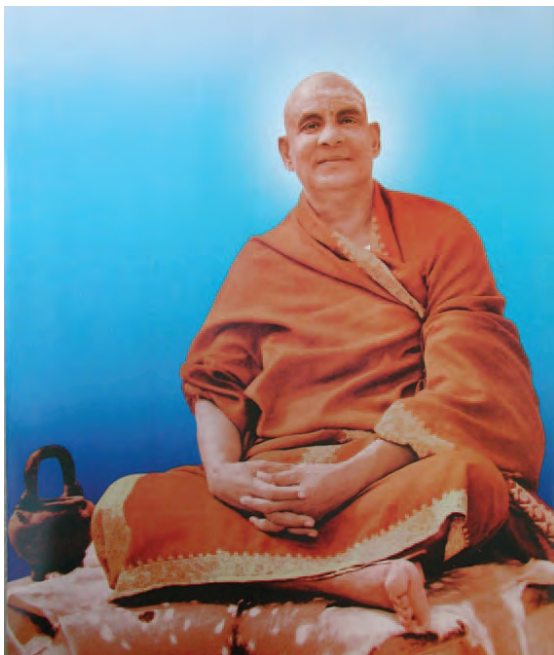
Published by Yoga Publications Trust
First edition 2012

ISBN: 978-93-81620-25-0

Publisher and distributor: Yoga Publications Trust, Ganga Darshan,
Munger, Bihar, India.

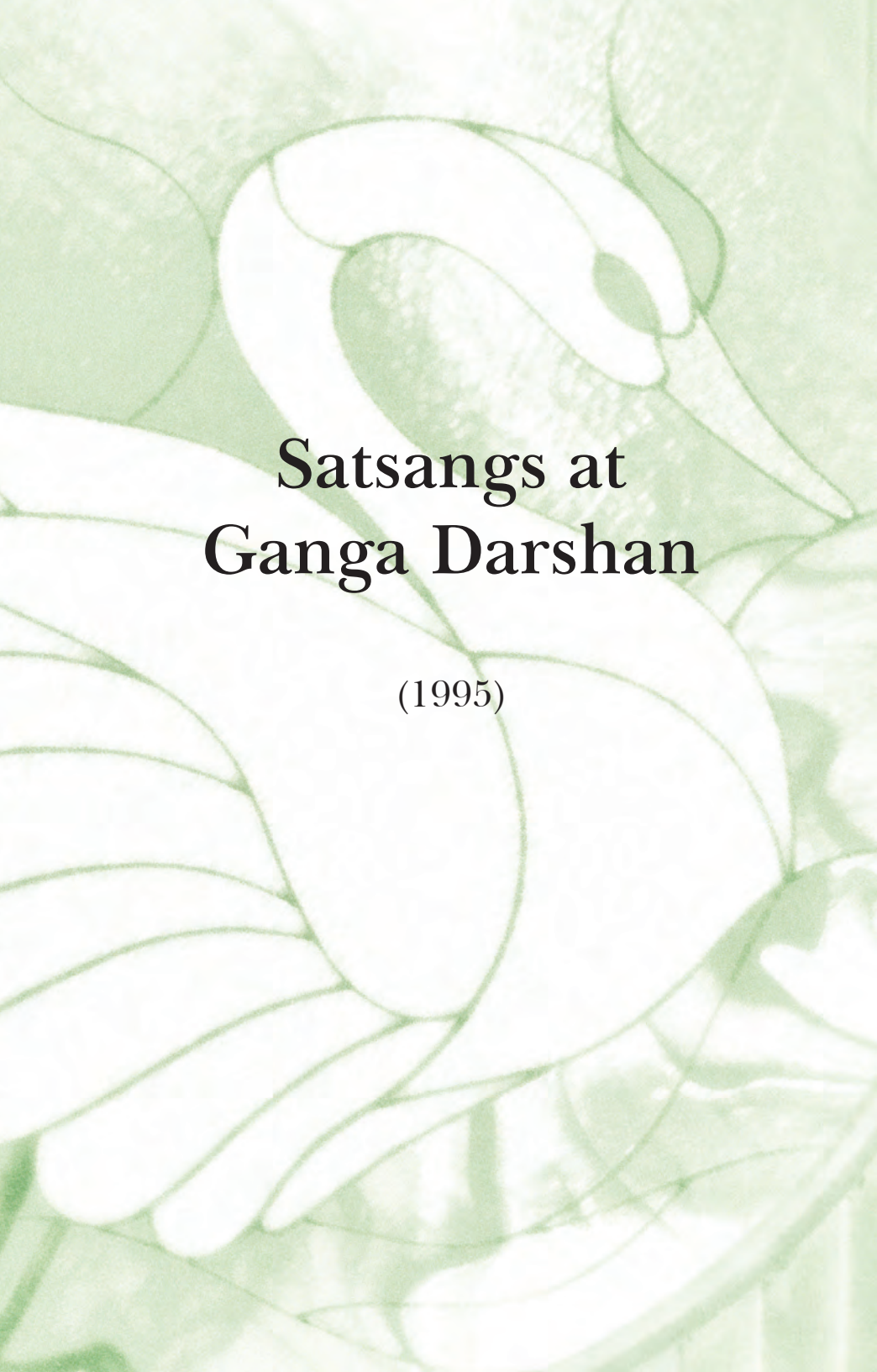
Website: www.biharyoga.net
www.rikhiapeeth.net

Printed at Thomson Press (India) Limited, New Delhi, 110001



Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*



Satsangs at Ganga Darshan

(1995)



As part of our winter sadhana, you asked us to try to remove ambition from our practice. I have a strong aim to raise the state of my awareness and my practice of sadhana to achieve this. Is this considered ambition? I find having an aim like this very useful in orienting myself in life, and I feel a strong resistance at the thought of changing this way of thinking.

An ambition is an ambition, whether it is to realize God or to gain ultimate power and control the world by destroying everyone in it.

Each manifestation of the personality is motivated and coloured by the three gunas. When ambition is tamasic it is destructive, but when it is sattwic it is elevating. Therefore, it is only the nature of the guna which has to change. One cannot overcome ambitions or desires, but one can definitely change the nature of the desires and ambitions. That is the yogic belief. Yoga does not believe that anyone can go beyond or transcend anything in life, and if you think you are in yoga to transcend, you are duping yourself.

Right now, you do not even know whether your thinking, behaviour and interactions with the world are tamasic, rajasic or sattwic. Right now, you cannot even control a single emotion. Just try controlling fear. Try to control anger or any feeling. Try to change one feeling from tamasic to sattwic. Do not try to change your entire

life, just one thing. If you can just change that one item in your life you will have attained a lot.

Only when all the traits of human life are converted into sattwic traits is it possible to transcend them. So keep trying. If your desire to know yourself or expand your awareness is an ambition, let it be a sattwic ambition. If you have a rajasic ambition which is negative in nature, then try to change it into a sattwic one. If it is sattwic then try to be more in tune with your sattwic ambition and maintain mental clarity. Finally, one day you will transcend.

How can yoga increase our feeling of brotherhood?

Brotherhood seems like a utopian dream. Everyone talks about it but there are certain salient points being missed. We have been talking about brotherhood for a long time, thousands of years, but our talk and thought remain just talk and thought. Implementation of these ideas does not seem possible, because we have disconnected certain aspects of our lives: our aspirations, our daily actions, and our philosophies.

Our actions go totally against our philosophies and sense of duty, because the motivation for these actions is individual wellbeing. Our aspirations are also self-orientated, while philosophy remains just a good book to indulge in whenever we feel depressed with life. Thus, we have created a big gap between our philosophies, aspirations and our day-to-day actions. This is one of the main reasons why we are unable to implement positive and constructive ideas for the benefit of society and humanity. If we can learn to reunite these three aspects then a change will be felt within us.

Alongside this reintegration of our actions, philosophies and aspirations, the thought pattern and entire personality will also undergo a change, and our actions will reflect that change, that philosophy which we have integrated into our lifestyle. This is why yoga has emphasized the aspect of yama and niyama, for the reason that the two can create a change in the normal pattern of mind. The entire yogic

structure is, in fact, geared to the attainment of this vision and experience of brotherhood.

What is the effect of *Om* chanting?

Om represents the primordial vibration which existed in the original state of the manifest universe. Different traditions and religions have described *Om* as nada, vibration, etc., but actually *Om* by itself has no meaning. Similar to *Om* are the words 'Amen' and 'Amin'.

There is a theory that wherever there is any kind of movement there is bound to be vibration, and wherever there is vibration there is bound to be sound. If we look deeply into the tissues and bones of our body we come to the level of atoms, the atomic structure of the body. In the centre of the atom is the nucleus which is a pulsating force. If we could listen to the sound which is being emitted by the pulsation of the nucleus we would find that the sound is the sound of *Om*, 'Amen' or 'Amin'. This is the theory which yoga has accepted.

Inside the brain are certain electrical discharges known as brainwaves relating to the different activities of the brain, mind and central nervous system. When we are active the brain emits beta waves; when we are relaxed or drowsy the beta waves subside and alpha waves predominate. Alpha represents the state of relaxation in the central nervous system, which represents the state of relaxation in cranial and cerebral activity. In other words, it represents relaxation in mental and emotional activity. Beyond these are delta and theta waves which represent the one-pointed nature of the mind when it is not distracted by environmental sounds, etc.

Research was done in a Spanish hospital to see how *Om* can actually help tranquilize patients when they come for an operation. They put a patient in a room and asked him to chant *Om* continuously for five minutes. Of course, the patient had no idea what he was doing, but while he was chanting the doctors monitored his brainwaves, skin resistance, blood pressure and cardiac pulse. They found that

after five minutes the fear of the operation, which normally creates tension in the brain and the body, was significantly under control. The experiment continued for about three months, using different patients who had absolutely no idea what they were doing.

Today, in that hospital, patients undergoing any kind of operation, whether minor or major, prepare themselves by chanting *Om* for five to ten minutes, alone, away from their families. The patient concentrates only on the breath and the mantra *Om*. This has proved to be very successful because the chanting of any of these sounds, *Om*, 'Amen' or 'Amin', produces certain vibrations of a specific length within the brain that help tranquilize the hyperactivity of the body. This is the main reason why we chant *Om* at the beginning and end of class, to consolidate our awareness, to get rid of the distractions that have created certain tensions and agitations in the body and mind, and to relax at the time of teaching.

What is tantra, where does it come from, and how is it taught?

Tantra is the original system of self-development which existed prior to the birth of organized religions and philosophies. The word *tantra* means expansion (of consciousness) and liberation (of energy). When we first start to wonder about our role in life, it is the beginning of tantra. When primitive man first looked at himself and his environment and asked, "What is all this?" "Who am I?" "How do I function?" and "How can I improve my performance?" it was the beginning of tantra. That process of self-discovery and evolution is actually what the system of tantra represents.

Tantra has five major divisions, but before I explain them I will tell you about the theory of tantra in brief. There are three concepts of tantra. The first is the concept of *pati*, which means ruler or governor; one who represents the ultimate reality. We can even call it God, that experience which is beyond the realm of intellect, speech and mind. The second concept is that of *pashu* or the individual in bondage,

that is to say our own behaviour which is influenced by different circumstances and events. The third concept is that of different forms of bondage in the world, namely *pasha*. Tantra says that an individual is bound by certain laws of nature and is a slave to the mind and worldly interactions.

In order to realize the divine with our present externalized consciousness we need to have a systematic approach. Hence, in the course of time the five systems of tantra were developed, and one of these was yoga, which aims to make us aware of the physical, psychological and spiritual dimensions and to enable us to obtain greater harmony and unification of the energies of body, mind and spirit. Yoga is an important branch of the tantric system.

The second system of tantra is *Siddhanta*, which means 'the perfect end of a concept'. In *Siddhanta* the practices develop a practical concept based on reality. The *sutra* or aphorism that sums up *Siddhanta* is, "Pleasure is an invitee while pain lives continuously in our house." It is the adjustment to pain and the balance of one's personality during pain which is taught in the *Siddhanta* aspect of tantra, so that pain does not have any negative or limiting influence on our expressions.

Pain is something everyone is truly afraid of. Any kind of problem, no matter how insignificant or small, becomes a mountain and consequently, mental peace is lost. *Siddhanta* teaches us how to analyze the different facts of life with mental clarity, and to act accordingly, while at the same time developing our positive qualities and nature.

The third system is *Vedachara* in which the main theme is to have unity with everything manifest and unmanifest. When you have a deep affection for or attachment to someone, their pleasure and pain automatically become yours, while those of a person with whom you do not have a close relationship do not affect you at all. Our feelings, our love and compassion are limited to our near and dear ones. They are not universal. However, in the *Vedachara* aspect of tantra, our feelings become universal. This quality can be

seen in the life of many of the saints around the world. So, Vedachara is the feeling of unity beyond duality.

The fourth system of tantra is *Shaivachara*. *Shaiva* means 'knowledge of Shiva', or the auspicious nature of the universe. In this system there are practices of meditation, mantras and yantras which help us to come nearer to the auspicious nature lying within us.

The fifth system of tantra is *Shakti*. Here, the lifestyle is accepted as it is. Tantra says that each one lives a different kind of lifestyle according to his or her nature and inclination, and that there is no need to change that nature, habit or inclination. The only thing that is necessary is to have an evolved awareness which is free from guilt, complexes and inhibitions. The normal lifestyle in which one expresses oneself through the five senses is accepted as a stepping stone towards the realization of higher states of consciousness. This is the tantric system in brief.

During illness and disease, can mantra japa be done while one is lying down?

There are no restriction as to when you have to do mantra japa. There are two ways of doing it. One is to do it systematically as a part of your daily sadhana, and the other is to do it naturally and spontaneously whenever you think about it. Of course, you have to use common sense. You should not close your eyes, hold your mala and start moving your beads and repeating your mantra while you are driving. No, that should not happen.

One of the basic consequences of mantra japa is introversion of mind. If we are exposed to a situation which calls for extroversion then mantra japa should not be performed at that time. But at the time of illness, when you may be thinking depressive or self-deprecating thoughts you should definitely repeat the mantra. Generally, at times of sickness we tend to become depressed and feel isolated. Then mantra japa can be very useful to create a positive mental attitude.

When you perform japa as part of your sadhana, you should, of course, follow the discipline concerning a fixed time and place. You should adopt a steady posture so that the body becomes still and there are no distractions from the senses. The mantra has to be practised in a state of meditation. However, when you are not practising the mantra as a part of your sadhana, you can do it even while working, travelling, being with other people, laying down or in any situation, and most definitely you should do it at the time of sickness.

Please explain the different qualities of worldly life in comparison to spiritual and sannyasa life.

There is a distinct difference between the *samsaric* way of life, mundane or worldly; the *atmajivan*, spiritual life and sannyasa life. Whereas in spiritual life you can have aspirations, in sannyasa life you need to have *purushartha*, effort.

In worldly life you are subject to the three gunas: sattwa, rajas and tamas. The mundane way of life, being regulated by the three gunas, is a life of external, even temporary, moments of pleasure, happiness, conflict and pain. Whichever guna is predominant creates many more subsidiary desires. Going through each stage of worldly life is like creeping and crawling, being subject to ones instincts and tendencies, ambitions and desires. Therefore, the definition of the word *samsara* in Sanskrit is *samsariti iti samsaraha*, *samsariti* meaning something which crawls, not walking upright. Each stage is subject to the predominating guna and the affliction, or state of change that the guna exerts on the *vrutti* or desire.

In the *samsaric* way of life, the faculties of action, knowledge and realization are distinct. There is eighty percent action in this dimension, fifteen percent *buddhi*, intelligence, and five percent realization. Therefore, in worldly life it is said that one is subject to one's karmas. Karmas are the total interaction of an individual with sensory life.

In spiritual life, with the gradual emergence of higher intelligence or *jnana*, there is a greater sense of control over one's actions. Realization has not yet come. In spiritual life there is no final stage of realization for the average person. It is like the statement, "Perfection is never perfect." There is always something more.

Spiritual life evolves through the increasing area of knowledge gained through interaction with the family, society, the world and the cosmos. This increase of knowledge gives us an idea of the existing possibilities, thus igniting our aspirations. In the course of time, these aspirations become the desire for God-realization, of wanting to realize our own nature and attain *atmajnana*. This aspiration for *atmajnana*, self-knowledge, becomes the motivating factor behind spiritual life. We crave more knowledge, more understanding, more awareness, not just literally but experientially.

The sannyasa way of life is something totally different from the previous two. Although for the sake of our own understanding of sannyasa, we have divided it into many categories, like *jignasu*, *karma*, *poorna*, *vivedisha*, *vidwat*, etc., real sannyasa life has a different type of vision. It does not seek or pursue any new aspiration. It seeks the realization of the aspiration which was envisioned in spiritual life.

Sannyasa training is also very distinct and different. It is a training which, to be frank, none of us has received. I can even say that I have not been given that training. That training is restricted to those few who are aware of the different facets of the mind from conscious to unconscious, who are aware of the direction that cravings and desires can take, who are aware of both the requirements of the individual and also the cosmos, because they understand that 'I am part of the cosmos'.

Sri Swamiji has said many times that taking sannyasa is like jumping from a precipice, without the support of any solid earth beneath. There is no support whatsoever, nothing for the hands to grasp or for the head to think, just the process of letting go! I mean, what is the use of using

the head? If you are falling into the void, what is the use of waving your arms and legs around when you know that there is nothing to hang on to?

This type of sannyasa training is not given to us because we are still trying to find our spiritual aspiration. At this stage our aspirations can change, depending on how much we have evolved. Just as a small baby's need for a toy changes as it grows up, our aspirations change as we become more and more mature and the new vistas of knowledge open up in front of us.

If, through this process of understanding, we consider sannyasa life to be a path to freedom, then even here a very important point arises which we have to realize before attaining this life of freedom. The basic ingredient of freedom is contentment. You may have all the qualities in the world but if you do not have contentment, you are not free. One can be an embodiment of all the billion qualities that exist in the world, but they cannot make up for this one quality of contentment. Contentment has to be realized before freedom can be experienced.

Contentment will only come if there is no craving, no conflict concerning thinking, emotion, status, name and fame, etc. If you can be content, then I can guarantee you freedom. If you cannot be content, then freedom will be difficult to attain. *Shaucha*, purity of heart; *santosha*, contentment; *swadhyaya*, self-knowledge; *tapas*, austerity; *ishwara pranidhana*, faith in one's inner nature, are the five niyama of the *Yoga Sutras*. These five niyama are the essential components for achieving a sense of harmony in every sphere of life, and ultimately having freedom of spirit.

Therefore, one must go through the samsaric or worldly way of life into the atmic or spiritual way of life, and then as a gradual progression one enters into the sannyasa way of life.

How can I succeed in maintaining regularity in sadhana?

Regularity in sadhana comes through effort, and sadhana only becomes fruitful when regularity is maintained.

Tatra sthitou yatnobhyaasah is the statement of the *Yoga Sutras* – regularity can only be maintained if there is faith, conviction and determination, and if you are ready to follow the sadhana for an extended period of time without getting bored.

Just as you consider food, water, breathing and wearing clothes to be needs of the body, and happiness to be a requirement for having satisfaction, contentment and joy in life, sadhana has to be considered as being necessary for attaining something beyond one's normal ability. You have to develop willpower and conviction. You need to do *purushartha*, action, full of effort, aimed at positive attainment in life.

I get the feeling from you that those of us without sufficient determination, willpower and conviction to instantly jump over all our desires, wants and ambitions without recourse to personal expression are in some way second class or inferior human beings. Is this true? If it is, how are we lesser beings going to be able to prevent the feelings of inadequacy and guilt developing within us?

If you get this feeling from me then it is good you should get it, because only if you lack willpower and self-determination would such a question be asked. The question is very unclear right from the beginning to the end, because a definite emphasis has been put on the word 'instantly', "to instantly jump over all desires, wants and ambitions". I do not think God ever made first-class citizens, because if He had, the world would be in a different shape than it is today.

You can see how people are behaving in the world today; it is all a quest for power. They go to any extent to get it and in the process manifest their most selfish rather than their universal qualities. Definitely we lack will, conviction and determination. In this respect each and every one of us is a second class citizen and definitely a very inferior type of human being in God's creation. We have not tapped our potential as human beings fully.

In every stage and form of life there is the possibility of maximum expression of potential. When that potential is expressed one hundred percent we will become first class citizens. The feelings of guilt and inadequacy develop from our inability to achieve this and there is no solution for it; you suffer from it and I suffer from it. So who is free from it? The ideal thing would be to instantly jump over ambition, greed, desires and wants, but since we all lack that ability, let us be happy as second class citizens.

What is the quickest way to gain the acceptance of another person who is living in a different space?

The best and quickest way is to put yourself into the shoes of the other person so that you think, act and behave like them while maintaining your own mental clarity. That is the simple answer.

What generally happens is that our own viewpoints and convictions tend to be rigid. We lack a broad vision and there is no wisdom in our thinking. We think, “My convictions are right”, and we tend to ignore the circumstances, situations, mentality, modes of behaviour and nature of the person with whom we are trying to create a rapport. If the other person happens to be of the same type and quality as us then an immovable force meets an immovable object. There is some friction, a clash and eventually a fall-out.

You will ask, “How can I put myself in another person’s shoes?” Well, there are two ways to do it. One way is to first know the aspirations, motivations and aims of the other person and then to support and help them as best as you can. The second way is to soften your heart.

There is a difference between the melting of the heart and the softening of the heart. Melting is not a nice thing because one becomes too involved and sticky, like melted chocolate. Yoga does not advocate melting of the heart, but rather it advocates a softening of the heart so that the rigidity of your feeling, belief and emotions becomes less, and you are more accepting of other people’s attitudes, behaviour,

actions and lifestyle. This acceptance comes with wisdom. If you have wisdom then you will maintain clarity of mind and a clear direction for your life. This is the major difference between the normal and the yogic way of thinking.

If I have to accept somebody who is crooked then I will also tend to become crooked in the course of time. On the other hand, if I have to accept somebody who is good then I also become good in the course of time. The nature of another person superimposes itself upon me at the time of acceptance, whether in a positive or negative, destructive or constructive way.

Acceptance in yoga goes along with awareness of one's own direction and goal in life, as well as an understanding of other people's mentality. Both mentalities must become compatible and this compatibility comes only when there is wisdom, a clear mind and right understanding. Without these three things there cannot be compatibility. There can be adjustment, but that adjustment will be temporary, not permanent; a temporary cease-fire between the two fighting factions and that cease-fire will not last long unless there is a softening of the heart.

Softening of the heart is a very great quality and I would even go to the extent of saying that it is the yogic quality through which you can gain acceptance in another person's space in order to help them progress and grow constructively.

What can I do to make my mind and heart soft in order to love and care for more people?

First of all cleanse your heart. Our hearts have become cluttered up with too many toxins from the gunas, both tamasic and rajasic, and all that needs to be removed.

To develop love is a sadhana in itself. It is something we experience and express in a very limited way. Our expression of love is confined to only a few near and dear ones. However, this is not the final expression. The ultimate expression of love is something which we have never

experienced and which nobody has had, with the possible exception of God. His light and energy can be perceived in everyone. However, we are not able to see the light of the teachings in everyone. We may be the followers of a particular tradition, system or religion, or have our own personal philosophy, but the teachings of that tradition have not manifested in us.

Just as we evolve and develop intellectually, we need to evolve and develop spiritually. Only when spiritual evolution takes place does love become universal. Until there is real spiritual growth, one can just sit quietly and think, “I love everybody, I love everybody”, but this will only remain a thought, it will not turn into a reality. One needs to have a different kind of vision in order for this to happen. To have cosmic love it is necessary to have cosmic vision. In order to have global love it is necessary to have an understanding of the people who live around the globe.

There has to be reconciliation between an individual's psychological nature and the spiritual nature. Our psychological and spiritual natures are contradicting each other right now. When I say psychological nature I mean the four traits of our personality: Strength, Weakness, Ambition and Need. I call this the SWAN Theory. Our entire life is structured around these four aspects.

A child has needs. Whether internal, external or emotional, a need is a need. A child has ambition. A child has his strengths. A child has weaknesses. It forms samskaras out of these four major traits. If its ambitions are powerful then it will have ambitious samskaras. If its needs and strength of mind are powerful then there will be those kinds of samskaras. This is the psychological nature.

The spiritual nature is distinct from the psychological nature. It can be defined in ten words through the yamas and the niyamas. The five yamas are satya, ahimsa, asteya, aparigraha and brahmacharya. *Satya*, truthfulness, is not just speaking the truth; it is feeling the truth from within. *Ahimsa*, non-violence, is not just abstaining from violence externally;

it is the total absence of violence from within the personality. The niyamas as explained in the *Yoga Sutras* are shaucha, santosha, tapas, swadhyaya and ishwara pranidhana. Many people think that *shaucha*, cleanliness, means having a bath three times a day, but it actually means having clean thoughts, clean expressions, clean behaviour, and being happy and content with what you have now, because contentment with the present makes the future positive and beautiful.

How difficult it is to reconcile these two natures! On one hand, you have strong ambitions and needs which are a part of your psychological nature. On the other hand, you have a desire to use the spiritual nature in the world. How will you use ahimsa if there is ambition and need? How will you use satya if there is weakness, ambition and need? You cannot. So, there has to be reconciliation between one's psychological nature and one's spiritual nature in order to develop a universal vision. After this, the natural qualities of the personality will flower spontaneously and you will develop universal love which is an expression of oneness with everyone and everything.

When you do not believe that the Aryans were alien to India, why does page seventy-five of *Sannyasa Darshan* start with, “When the Aryans entered India”?

In my understanding, the Aryans did not invade India or anything like that. Every civilization is composed of groups of people who represent different *jatis* or tribes. Each tribe has its own way of thinking, behaving and living, of expressing the arts and sciences, and of developing their skills and knowledge.

In order for life to evolve it needs certain conditions in which there is plenty of vegetation, water, sunshine, animals, fruits and produce. These are essential for the generation of life. Around the equatorial belt we find a concentration of various races. In China, we find a particular race extending from China to Japan, Indonesia, Burma and Tibet. They have distinct features and are a distinct race. From regions of India

up towards Iran, Afghanistan and Iraq, the race is different. In Africa, it is different again. In the Central and South American regions there is yet another type of people.

The intermingling of different races produces a sub-race, which is known as *upajati* and *prajati*. So we have a sub-race and within the sub-race, different races again.

Originally, the birth of civilization took place around the equatorial belt, and people moved from these regions to inhabit various parts of the world in search of greener pastures. As they encountered different climatic conditions, having to adapt themselves accordingly, the skin colour changed. If I go and live in Europe, after five or six generations my offspring will have a different skin colour. That is the effect of the environment.

People say that the Aryans migrated from cold to warmer countries, from Central Asia to Europe, when actually these were the same people who had migrated originally and were now returning to their native place. As they had encountered and adapted to various climatic conditions in a different environment, they were more adept in the art of warfare. The friction which took place at the time of their return is considered to be the invasion of the Aryans, but it was actually a fight between tribes of the same race. They were more proficient in the use of arms and better organized as a society. They also had the upper hand, but I do not think we could call that an invasion of the Aryans.

Therefore, I do not think there is any conflict in what I believe and what is written in *Sannyasa Darshan*. You just have to use your imagination and knowledge.

What does the term *shubhavasanas* imply and how can one cultivate them?

The word *vasana* means passion, and *shubha* means auspicious. On one hand, we have to lead the life of an aspirant who is searching for some form of eternal happiness or truth, while on the other hand, ordinary interaction in the world has to take place along with the expression of our *vasanas*.

These vasanas are restricting and limit the expression of our faculties. For example, overindulgence is a vasana. If it were not for the vasanas, overindulgence would not take place.

Vasanas can also be sensual, a deep attraction to something or somebody, to a member of the opposite sex or to some old possession with which there is an emotional link. Vasanas can be tactile as well, for example, the need to feel something nice and soft, like silk, gives pleasure. If you hold something coarse, rough and hard, it does not give you pleasure. So the desire to possess something soft and smooth can become a vasana. Food, sleep and lethargy can also be vasanas. These are the normal things which we express in the course of our daily interactions, and those vasanas satisfying our own personal needs predominate.

Then there are vasanas coloured by *raga* and *dvesha*: attraction and repulsion. If you really hate somebody, say your worst enemy, and you think of them with anger and passion, then the negative aspects of your personality manifest. If you think of somebody whom you love deeply, then you will feel an outburst, an outpouring of love and the feeling of desire. The expression of these vasanas is limited to oneself.

These same vasanas can be converted into shubha or auspicious vasanas. Material love can be converted into divine love. Physical feelings can be converted into something transcendental, something subtle. The change of the form of vasanas, from something individual to something auspicious and beneficial for everyone, is known as *shubhavasana*.

Let us take the example of Sri Swamiji. While he was in the ashram he identified with the ashram, so although his actions and life were selfless, he still had to think and act for the benefit of something. That was a vasana, regardless of the fact that he was selfless. His needs were never as important to him as the needs of others, but he had to interact in the world. If he did not see you for one year you would go crazy because you were seeking that kind of interaction. Even

today the question automatically arises, “When is he going to see us?”, because there is a craving for that interaction. At that time, he had to act in an external and certain way but now the inspiration he is receiving, and the way he is living, has changed his vasanas into shubhavasanas.

Now he does not say, “Go and build this for my institution.” Instead, he says, “Go and build homes for the poor in the region.” His current attitude reaches out; it is not confined to the tasks he imposed on himself. The feeling he had previously for something that was his has now extended beyond the range of his attachments or identification. That is shubhavasana. Until our death we have to interact with everyone, we cannot avoid it. So why remain self-centred? Why not act in a way that is beneficial and auspicious for everyone?

Sri Swamiji could easily have said, “Oh, everybody can go get lost. I’ve come here for my sadhana and that’s what I’m going to do!” but this would have been satisfying his own personal vasana. The inspiration he received, whether it was from God or from his deeper self, had changed his vasana into shubhavasana, and this was distinct from his spiritual aspirations and his spiritual life. So here we see a nice example of integrating the external life with the inner life.

If we were in his place, things would have been different. We would consider our work to be either social work unrelated to our sadhana, or something restricted to sadhana alone, having nothing to do with the outside world. If you and I were in Sri Swamiji’s place we would say, “Why do I need to interact with people when I’ve come here for my own sadhana? I don’t want to interact with people, with the locals, with my fellow sannyasins and friends.” Our approach would have been to see our sadhana as something totally isolated from the natural expression of life, and become further isolated within. In Sri Swamiji’s way there is an integration which is conducive to spiritual life.

How can you cultivate this? Stop being self-centred. You have to look after yourself, no doubt, but do not be obsessed

about it, and when you act, do not be obsessed about your actions. Act in the spirit of karma yoga; when you try to understand something, do not use only your intellect but be guided by your feelings also.

Many times when I say something, I can see everybody's brain working like a typewriter, click, click, click, and I think to myself, "Everyone's brain is clicking away, should I stop, or should I continue?" Ninety-nine percent of people try to understand what I say intellectually, and one percent cannot be bothered to make the effort to understand. Therefore, nobody really understands anyway, because if you did understand what I say in all the satsangs, you would not have head-trips or hang-ups, depression or anxieties - no. These things are clear proof that nobody has understood!

There would not be any questions, either. Questions only come when the intellect is used. Somebody asked a question a few days ago, "How can one be acceptable in another person's space?" I gave an answer, with the awareness that most people listening to the answer were going to interpret it in another way. They would say later on, "I did everything possible to be in the other person's space, but I failed." It was because they were analyzing it intellectually, and mere intellectual analysis can lead to a deeper obsession.

In the *Ishavasya Upanishad* there is a very beautiful passage, "Avidya or ignorance leads to darkness, but vidya, or knowledge, can lead to even greater darkness." As the expression goes – a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. This is a very true statement, because the more you try to know, the more you tie yourself up in intellectual knots.

The process of understanding in yoga is not an exclusively intellectual process, but rather a combination of three things: intellect, emotion and instinct. These three things happen spontaneously and naturally. Integration of these leads to actual realization or understanding. If there is separation or isolation of the three, it will only lead to head-trips, heartaches and depression. Therefore, in order to have shubhavasana, integrate the intellect with emotion and instinct.

How can one overcome a long-standing mental block created by a certain situation which impedes spiritual growth and the ability to offer one's services to others, or to dedicate oneself to a cause?

Begin by practising yoga, because mental blocks are nothing but an outcome of the samskaras and karmas which make up our personality. We encounter blocks in relation to our interactions with other people, or in relation to our aspirations and motivations. For instance, I want to do something but something holds me back and I do not know what it is.

Regarding our meditation practice there is often an intense experience of either isolation or some form of fear coming from some place. We do not know why or from where it is coming or when it is going to stop. The blocks caused by samskaras and karmas are much more difficult to handle. They have a different nature. We tend not to talk so much about the blocks which emanate from our personality.

If you are sincerely following the four parts of raja yoga: asana, pranayama, pratyahara and dharana, then it will be possible for you to overcome the personality blocks. What are my shortcomings? What can I do to overcome them? How can I improve myself? All this analysis and discovery can take place through the practice of asana, pranayama, pratyahara and dharana.

However, spiritual seekers and many yoga students find a block in the realm of energy and that is what most disturbs them. Sometimes the energy of a particular chakra is activated, and if the sadhaka is not prepared, he will feel an extreme manifestation of energy in the form of burning within the body. It is an actual sensation of heat and not just imaginary. Then there is the cooling down sensation of the body, a fall in the body temperature in the middle of summer: you shiver even when you sit in forty-five degrees centigrade. These are some of the actual energy blocks that can be experienced.

Many times blocks in the deeper consciousness related to samskaras and karmas are also experienced. To manage them, one has to evolve gradually from the practices of raja yoga to the practices of kundalini yoga – chakra balancing (chakra shuddhi), tattwa balancing (tattwa shuddhi). The complete system of yoga is needed to remove all the blocks so that you can express the entire personality spontaneously and naturally. The ultimate removal of the karmic blocks is known as nirvana or samadhi.

What is more virtuous, selfishness or selflessness? Should consideration for others take precedence over one's own wishes? Is selflessness the answer to everything?

No, selflessness is not the answer to everything because many times selfishness becomes important. This has to be understood in the proper light. Generally people say selfishness is bad and selflessness is good, but you must also ensure that by being selfless, you do not inhibit your own emotions, desires and actions and that you do not restrict your own creativity. So there has to be a balance between selfishness and selflessness.

The four major aspects of our personality which are responsible for our performance and behaviour are our strengths, weaknesses, needs and ambitions. In order to become selfless we would have to leave all these behind. So often we find that selfless people are the most unmotivated, lethargic type of people. That is not a good example of selflessness.

To be selfless actually means that you are aware of your own qualities, your strengths, and that you use them for the benefit of others as well as for yourself. This is the real meaning of selfless, when your full faculties are used for the general good, including yourself. Apart from fulfilling your own needs, fortifying your own beliefs, awakening your own strengths, qualities and faculties, and overcoming your own limitations and weaknesses, you should also be able to do something constructive for the benefit of society. Which is the more

virtuous of the two? Neither is more virtuous than the other, selfishness and selflessness both have to go side by side.

Is labelling people as being mentally ill valid, such as, ‘schizophrenic’? Can I help these people with yoga?

Of course it is valid. If you are physically sick and able to identify the sickness, then giving it a name is appropriate. If someone has a fever you say that they have a fever. If they have a tumour you say that they have a tumour. There are many labels of one form or another. If you are able to give a physical label, why not a mental one?

There are illnesses which are generated in the realm of the mind just as there are illnesses which are generated in the realm of the emotions. In order to identify any kind of illness it is necessary to have a clear idea about it. If we label someone as being psychotic or schizophrenic, this label represents the manifestation of a particular nature or bent of mind, for example an imbalance, weakness, or inner conflict. In each case the treatment has to be different.

Mental imbalance requires a particular type of treatment while mental stress requires another type of treatment. With schizophrenia we proceed differently and in the case of psychosis, we prescribe yet another treatment. Therefore, in order to identify what the problem is, it certainly is valid to label it, because whether the mentally ill can be helped by yoga or not depends very much on the type of mental illness they have.

This morning during satsang a lady came to me with a boy who was actually catatonic. He had been diagnosed as psychotic and schizophrenic, and I also labelled him catatonic. If he is in a standing position, he will just remain standing; if his arm is up, it will remain up. His mother wanted to dump this boy here for treatment but I flatly refused. Would you be able to look after a person like that? You have to be constantly after him to eat, and he is definitely not going to eat. “Come and work,” you tell him, but then you would have to be after him about that, and he

is not going to come. We are not a mental hospital. We are a sannyasa ashram and a school of yoga, and the mode of treatment necessary for such a case has to be understood before we decide to take in a mental patient.

There are certain conditions in which yoga can be helpful. In America I would visit drug rehabilitation centres, half-way homes and asylums, teach yoga there and observe the benefits. Even the catatonics were helped, but they had the proper supportive environment, medically as well as therapeutically. Combined with this support system, yoga was able to help, but here we do not have this type of support and yoga alone will not be enough.

My suggestion to the lady this morning was to take him for electric shock therapy to bring him out of his catatonic state. Many people reacted against it but that was the suggestion I gave her. "Give him shocks, make him active, put him under drug therapy until he becomes thirty to forty percent better and is able to look after himself, then apply yoga. When he becomes conscious of his needs and strives to fulfil them, begin yoga therapy, but not at this stage when he is helpless." If you have a support system, then definitely you can use yoga and you will get encouraging results, but you need to have a good understanding of yoga therapy and how it works on an individual suffering from a mental problem.

Some time ago, there was a girl here from Australia who was diagnosed as schizophrenic. She had to be taken back to Australia for some reason, and while in Delhi she marched into the American Embassy and said, "I want to call up my father." Later she said, "Why have they put my picture up all over the town?" She meant the cinema posters. For her, the girl in them was herself.

These are just a few examples of different kinds of people, different cases. One must have a deep understanding of yoga therapy as well as the background of the person's illness, for only then will yoga work for these people. Until we have this kind of knowledge it is better not to attempt mental therapy. Yoga is not a pill you pop into your mouth.

It is not an asana you practise five times daily and then go for a check-up with your doctor at the end of the week.

Sri Swamiji has spoken about teachers of yoga being transmission poles of his energy. Is this idea changing now? Are yoga teaching and guru two separate areas?

This is a wrong question. Sri Swamiji has referred to something personal, related to him – yoga teachers as conductors of his energy. You have to take it as his personal statement, because his method of teaching yoga to us was definitely on a different plane and dimension altogether. That was because we had a different mentality than the people who are here now. Today, in order to get some work done from them we have to say ‘pretty-please’, only then will they do it. If there is some harshness in the command then their mouths become like frogs, because their egos get hurt. That is the mentality of the people who are here at present.

In my time, we had a different vision and feeling for Sri Swamiji and his mission. Due to that we imbibed the ‘work and service’ attitude as opposed to your ‘I need to be pleased’ attitude. In those days, work used to be a joy for us and something to look forward to, whereas today the work is like an obligation which you people are fulfilling. There is no joy in it. Therefore, this statement of his does not apply to you. It applies only to those who are committed to his mission with a feeling of contentment, happiness and joy.

The attitude of a swami should be, “So long as I have prana in my body, no matter what happens to me, the work has to continue because I have come here for this, not to please my ego.” People with that kind of mentality definitely become transmission poles of the energy of the guru. For them the teaching of yoga is not a job in which they find satisfaction. Rather, it is a part of their commitment and their duty to life and humanity, and there is no ego involvement in it. In this context, yoga teaching and being the transmission poles of the guru in the present day are definitely two distinct things, and one cannot combine the two.

Is human life the worst life that a man thinks about moksha during his human life?

Well, sometimes I have also wondered about this, but it is not a question of 'worst' or 'best'. It is just a part of one's dharma, duty and inner commitment to the higher self. No one is forcing moksha on anyone, although it is always said that this is the state you can attain, that this is the way you can go. Life has to follow a pattern of external and internal balance, and moksha is just an outcome of this process. It is not even something for which you have to make an effort. It is the outcome of a balanced and integrated lifestyle.

When people say that they aspire for moksha, what they are aspiring for is the concept of moksha, meaning that in moksha there is freedom from pain and suffering. In moksha one can overcome the limited nature of the personality and develop a universal vision, so people are attracted to this concept of moksha, not to moksha itself.

Moksha is a living experience that takes place after one has gone through all the *purusharthas* or efforts of life. It is an outcome of that. This possibility is of course given to human beings, but I think the same desire and thrust is there in the other life forms, only it is more instinctive than analytical, more natural and spontaneous than logical and rational. Human beings have been given the use of their intellect in order to understand and know what goes on in the process of *purushartha*, but other life forms have not. This is the only difference.

Politicians and cinema artists have spoiled our country in order to get cheap popularity. Cinemas possess the younger generation. As responsible parents, what should we do?

You say the politicians or film artists are polluting society, but I think each and every one of us, in one way or the other, is polluting society – some in a visible form, some in an invisible form. Everyone is responsible for providing good and bad *samskaras* to the future generations. There is a lack

of *viveka*, discernment, that is taking us in the direction of enjoyment in the form of sensual and sensorial pleasure, and which is not geared for providing good samskaras.

There has to be an alternative form of education in order to provide positive, creative and constructive samskaras in the different dimensions of life. There has to be positive samskaras of expression, interaction, behaviour, discipline, and so on. Samskaras do not only refer to the spiritual inclinations of an individual, they also refer to each and every activity performed through the senses, mind, memory, cognition, even during sleep.

If we can become aware of our strengths, then I am sure we can provide that samskara to the future generation and at the same time inspire others to provide their good samskaras. Everybody is responsible. Human beings in general are responsible for either creating or destroying the positive evolution of humanity.

Can you explain the difference between having an external guru and having an internal, personal guru?

Unfortunately the concept of internal guru is misunderstood by most of us. The internal guru cannot be experienced if you study in primary class. In order to experience the internal guru you have to do a diploma course, thesis and doctorate. Finding the internal guru is the very last thing on the spiritual path. Initially, the external guru is more important.

Why does this concept of internal guru apply only to the guru and not to the wife or husband? Many people used to tell me in the United States that they followed their internal guru and did not need a guru outside. I used to tell them, “Sure, have an inner wife also and you won’t need an external one waiting for you at home – or husband, or children, or friends!”

Just as there is the need for an external support or prop, there is a definite need for an external guru – and that guru cannot be internal in any way. It is that guru who

can ultimately take you to the attainment and realization of the inner guru, if he thinks you are fit. Once you have the realization of the inner guru you realize that the external and the internal gurus were not different. They were one and the same all the time.

Within this jungle of vrittis, how do I know what is reality and what is leading me into fantasy, possibly due to samskaras based on desires?

You can be sure that you cannot know reality in the world of vrittis. In order to know that, you have to try to go beyond them because *vritti* or *vritta* means circle and a circle is a continuation without a beginning or end. Vrittis are without beginnings or endings. Do fantasies ever begin and do fantasies ever end? No.

When we are children we play with dolls and when we grow up we play with real characters. Attachment never ends, conflict and disillusionment never end. *Pramana*, right knowledge, *viparyaya*, wrong knowledge, *vikalpa*, fancy, *nidra*, sleep, and *smriti*, memory, these are the five vrittis defined by yoga, and within these five there are many levels of sub-vrittis. Even in *pramana* there are different sub-vrittis, as there are in *viparyaya*. Regarding memory, one can have a memory of the past, of an ambition, of one's weaknesses, of one's qualities, and one can also have different kinds of vrittis within a vritti.

Hence, to experience reality, which is the absence of vrittis from the zone of perception, is practically impossible. Therefore, yoga and the other darshan systems emphasize the systematic practice of certain disciplines and rules, whether they be *asana*, *pranayama*, techniques of *pratyahara* and *dharana*, or the practices of *dhyana*. Even in the state of *samadhi* one goes through different stages of vritti observation.

Ultimately, after *nirvikalpa* and *maha samadhi*, one experiences the reality which is untainted by the forces of the vrittis belonging to the dimension of *prakriti*. It is not

possible to experience reality while we have the body, brain, mind, intellect and ego, so let us just keep on trying to control them first.

How can one overcome mental chattering? Please tell us about vichar sanyam.

Mental chattering is the ripples being created in the dimension of the mind. Generally, whatever happens inside the mind is seen by the cognitive faculty as a thought pattern. Let us take the emotion of anger, for example. Along with the rawness of that emotion there will also be a rational pattern which can be identified as the thought of anger. Desire will have a rational pattern that can be identified as a thought, and in this way, everything will carry one special mark or imprint which is recognized by the mind as a thought pattern.

In order to control these thought patterns, the practices of pratyahara and concentration techniques train you to pick up a particular thought pattern and try to go into the deeper, more subtle aspect of it. Ultimately, you will reach the point of origin, and in this way the various thought patterns that continue incessantly without any conscious or voluntary control can be brought under conscious control.

Bringing thoughts under conscious control is known as *vichar sanyam*. Pratyahara deals specifically with becoming aware of the different vicharas related with the senses. Here we go to the point of their source and at that level become the guide to those thought patterns, so that they become constructive and uplifting and do not take us into states of confusion or anxiety.

Sanyam generally means conscious and creative control, as sometimes there can be conscious and destructive control; the forceful holding on to something more powerful than our own strength can manage. Therefore, conscious, voluntary and positive control is known as sanyam over the *vicharas* or thoughts. That is vichar sanyam.

In the West there is much talk about chakras and kundalini yoga, etc. Yoga says that one's destiny is to develop one's inherent potential, and to awaken the kundalini shakti. How important is it to know one's own stage of development? Can one know without asking a guru?

If one has attained a very high degree of *prajna*, intuition, then it will be possible to know at which state one is without the help of a guru. Prajna comes about only after you have subjected yourself to a rigorous discipline or *tapasya*, of having moment to moment self-control over all dimensions from the physical to the most subtle. The guru, however, can witness the progress you are making objectively. The guru will not necessarily tell you about it, he may not discuss the subject with you even if you ask him. He will just tell you to get on with the job and forget about it.

However, there is an awareness in the guru's mind about you and how far you might have gone. Your realization of how far you have gone should not be affected by the idea, "I am superior to you. I am holier than thou." If that idea comes, the ego becomes active. If I say, "Yes, you have awakened your anahata chakra" and suddenly you start wandering around the ashram hugging each and every flower, then this is definitely a 'no-no'. These are the things that the guru has to correct and he has to decide whether or not to tell you about your progress.

Please name some great gurus of the Dashnami tradition.

There have been many renowned gurus of the Dashnami order. Some of the names which come to mind are Swami Totapuri, the guru of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Ramakrishna Paramahansa himself, Swami Vivekananda, Paramahansa Yogananda, Baba Muktananda and his guru Baba Nityananda. They all maintained a deep awareness of and link to their tradition despite having attained high states of realization. These are only some of the saints and visionaries who stand out today as great guides of humanity.

How can we make sure that we do not leave when we should not leave, or stay on when we should not stay on, with the person whom we think is our guru and who has initiated us?

Well, this question should not come up if you have accepted or adopted someone as your guru. In the mind of the disciple there has to be just one thought – letting go, surrendering, overcoming ambitions, desires, likes and dislikes, and self-oriented perceptions. If the disciple is of this category, then such questions do not arise because there is an intense feeling between the disciple and the guru.

Just imagine that you are out on the sea in a boat without oars, rudder, or engine, at the mercy of the waves that can take the boat in any direction. You have no say over that. You cannot impose your ambition, likes and dislikes. You have to flow with the current which is more powerful than you. That is the relationship of a guru and disciple. When the relationship is superficial, personal aspirations become more powerful than surrender to the guru and often the aim in life, the reason for which we have taken a guru, is forgotten. If this has happened to you, then you fall into this category and you should try to come back to the first category, one way or the other, and flow with the current.

Swami Satyananda has asked us to pray that he has darshan of God. To me, he is God already, so this makes no sense to me.

Whatever Sri Swamiji's state of realization may be, whether he is God himself or not, does not really matter, because he is experiencing, or even transcending, another stage of his life in which he is experiencing the different forms of bhakti – *bala bhava*, the attitude of a child, *dasya bhava*, the attitude of a servant, *sakhya bhava*, the attitude of a companion. The last form of bhakti is *sayujya*, union, which happens not only on a spiritual, but also on a physical plane, and every manifest plane. This is the meaning of darshan.

When Sri Swamiji says that all of us should pray that Swami Satyananda should get God's darshan, he is absolutely right in expressing the sentiment that he wants to have, not only a spiritual darshan, but a physical darshan as well. It becomes our duty to pray for that because, although we are so far from spiritual realization and are too caught up in our own eccentricities, we can definitely pray to God, "Look, I don't stand a chance in this life, so let my efforts and energies go towards a person who can have your darshan in the physical form." And I think it will be a very worthwhile attempt because if there is someone in this world who is capable of having a physical darshan, it is him, and no one else in the galaxy of sadhus and sannyasins.

What is maya?

According to yoga, maya is not illusion, although it is defined as such. The word *maya* actually means an altered state of perception. Just as you have a nightmare which seems real at the time, maya is also considered to be a reality at a particular level of consciousness. The dream is not actually real but while you are experiencing it, it seems very real, and your entire personality is affected by it.

The yogis have said that our actions and interactions in the world are similar to that of a dream, and there is a very valid reason why they have said this. Normally, a distinction is made between the faculties and qualities of the head, heart and hands. Head represents the intellect, heart represents the emotions, and hands represent the performance of action. Any lack of harmony in these three gives rise to different feelings, emotions and attitudes in life.

Our interaction in the world is based on the two principles of *raga* and *dwesha*, attraction and repulsion. The things, events or situations from which we derive pleasure, happiness and satisfaction are known as raga. We are attracted to those things from which we get maximum contentment. Dwesha, or repulsion, is an aspect which we

tend to disassociate ourselves from because it does not give us any sense of satisfaction.

This swing from raga to dwesha, from one side to the other, from like to dislike, is known as maya. In this swinging process there is no clarity, harmony or peace in the faculties of the head, heart and hands. Therefore, it has been stated that the world which we perceive is unreal. The main reason for this is that in each stage of life we express and experience a split personality.

When the head or intellect is predominant, we tend to lose touch with our emotions and feelings and the head manifests as a rational power. The head and intellect, however, have two roles to play; one role is to be active in the external life and the other is to link the personality with the inner nature. That knowledge of the inner self is known as wisdom or *viveka*, the discerning power or knowledge of right and wrong.

The same two roles are experienced with the faculty of the heart also. The part of our heart that deals with the external world manifests in the form of attachment and raw emotions like anger, jealousy, hatred, fear and anxiety. At the same time, the emotions manifest internally in a different way, in the form of unconditional love and compassion. When the inner and outer natures of our personalities are in harmony, then the human personality evolves properly. This integrated and harmonious evolution of the personality is known as going away from maya, retiring from the swing of mind, emotions and actions.

In order to control the head we need to have *viveka*, the power of discrimination. In order to direct the emotions, we need to have *vairagya*, non-attachment, and in order to improve the performance of the body and mind in the external world, we need to have the concept of karma yoga. It is better to understand maya in relation to your own life and actions, because you can read philosophy in any book.

Is there a connection between karma and suffering? How can we develop a positive attitude towards suffering? How does the grace of guru intervene to alleviate any form of pain so that we are not tempted to take recourse to other forms of healing, which may even be considered as witchcraft?

We tend to reject suffering as being bad and limiting, but suffering can become a process through which we can use our own strengths and potential to the maximum. Therefore, instead of being depressed by our suffering, we should utilize all our faculties to overcome it.

There is a difference between karma and suffering. Suffering occurs when there is no proper adjustment to the circumstances of life. Karma tends to motivate and push a person in a particular direction. It is very similar to destiny; sometimes we become a good person, sometimes a bad person. Karma represents the stage of evolution that we might have experienced in our previous births, whereas suffering is very much physical in nature, belonging to the manifest dimension. There has to be acceptance of suffering, and we should be able to adjust to it. Acceptance and adjustment are necessary in order for us to understand suffering and to enable us to convert it into a learning process.

If there is a deep identification with the guru, many times his energy helps us in times of suffering. This can occur even without the knowledge of the guru because at that level, guru does not mean a physical person, but the energy which helps us overcome and transcend suffering. Definitely, the grace of guru can descend and one can experience it in the form of something happening in a dream, as an energy transmission or a miracle.

I will give you an example. One disciple of Sri Swamiji's suffered a sudden attack of partial paralysis on the entire left side of the body. Three days after having had the attack, she had a dream. She was in Madras at the time and she dreamt that Sri Swamiji came to her and gave her a big kick in the

left side of the body and said, "What are you doing? Get up quickly." After that she started to recuperate, and within a week she was totally normal. So, in this instance, the guru's grace came in the form of a dream.

Another example I can give you is of a person who was suffering from cancer. She started meditating and in her meditation she saw a very clear image of Sri Swamiji manifesting in front of her and giving her a rose. Upon receiving this vision, her entire body went into a spasm. She stayed in that spasmodic state for about a week. She was hospitalized, all kinds of tests were done, no malignancy of cancer was found. That was a form of energy transmission. A miracle is a miracle. Such things can happen, and they happen when there is an intense identification with the guru.

Another example of a miracle concerns a very sick person, a resident of Deoghar, suffering from tuberculosis who came to the gates of the Akhara. The doctor there said she could not help him, and that he had only three days to live; he was in the last stage. She came to Sri Swamiji and said, "This person has come and he is just on his way to the graveyard." Sri Swamiji became very angry. He said, "Why are you telling me all these things? I am not here to heal people, I am doing my sadhana. Don't disturb me, get out of here!" When she emerged from Sri Swamiji's room she was shaking, she was a nervous wreck. In order to make the person happy she gave him three aspirin tablets and got rid of him very fast. Three days later the man walked in, healthy and hearty!

We feel strongly that there is no need to take recourse to witchcraft or any other practices, provided there is an understanding of what is happening to us. Yoga has a very simple theory that if the body can make itself sick, it also has the ability to cure itself. Of course, there also needs to be strong willpower on the part of the person wanting a cure. If the willpower is strong then there is no need to take recourse to any other form of healing.

What is the relationship between tantra and the yoga practices of the Bihar School of Yoga? And what is the aim of kundalini yoga?

Yoga is one of the branches of tantra; its aim is the development of human consciousness and the liberation of dormant potential energy. This energy is transcendental, but when it manifests in the human body, it has to go through different transformers. These transformers are known as chakras and in each transformer the quality and manifestation of energy are different.

For example, if you have studied kundalini yoga, you will know that the pure, unmanifest, universal energy resides in sahasrara chakra. In the process of the manifestation of energy, it becomes mind force in ajna chakra. As it descends, this energy changes again, becoming the space element of vishuddhi chakra. In anahata, it manifests as the force of air and is related to the emotions. In manipura chakra the same energy manifests in the form of vitality or the fire element. Then it manifests as subconscious activity in swadhisthana chakra, which is represented by the water element. The final transformation of energy manifests in mooladhara chakra, in the form of dense matter. Here, the energy stops its manifestation and is perceived as a serpent in mooladhara.

Mythically speaking, the serpent is the harbinger of truth, or the means through which we gain knowledge of good and evil. Adam was enticed by kundalini, in order to maintain human life in the gross plane. Prior to this, he was in constant communion with God. He was divine and gross at the same time. This snake in mooladhara chakra is depicted as having three-and-a-half coils which represent the three gunas of tamas, rajas and sattwa. In the practice of kundalini yoga, it is said that the awakening of kundalini represents the reversal of energy, from its gross manifestation through the subtle to the transcendental.

For this purpose, the practices of kundalini yoga are divided into three groups. The first group of practices is

prana utthana, the awakening of prana in the body. The second group awakens the chakras so that the sushumna passage becomes clear. The third group aims at raising the force from mooladhara right up to sahasrara. Therefore, through the practices of kundalini yoga, we are able to experience the liberation of that energy which is not bound by the nature of the elements and the mind. This is the aim of kundalini yoga.

What is shakti? Are gurukripa, shaktipat and shakti the same thing? If not, what is the difference?

Shakti is cosmic energy. There are two aspects of cosmic energy, the manifest and the unmanifest. That which is manifest in the form of the elements, in the form of mahaprana, is shakti. That which is manifest as bioenergy in the body, the life force, is also shakti. That which is unmanifest is Shakti, too. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to conceive of anything without shakti, as shakti is the very rhythm and pulse of both the unmanifest and manifest dimensions.

Whatever does not have a pulse, a rhythm, does not exist, whether as object, form or idea. Therefore, cosmic shakti has to be understood as a combination of both the manifest and the unmanifest. The manifest universe is *vyakta*, or the solar force, the masculine power or the pingala flow. The unmanifest is *avyakta* or the lunar force, the feminine power or the ida flow.

The experience of becoming aware of the different stages, intensities or forms of shakti, is known as *shaktipat*. Some forms of shaktipat only tickle the body, some create tingling sensations, some create visions of light in the mind, some induce fits of unconsciousness, some bring momentary lapses of memory or other active attributes of consciousness, and some cause divine realization to manifest. These are the manifest aspects of the cosmic energy that a human being can perceive, think about and conceptualize. The unmanifest shaktipat is an extension of the shaktipat which is meant for

enlightenment. This level is too far ahead of us, I will talk only about the manifest aspects of shakti.

Shakti exists but we have no awareness of its existence. The heart beats continuously; there is energy, motion and rhythm which makes the heart pulsate. We breathe in and out continuously; there is a force making us breathe, but we are not aware of that process, we are not aware of the manifestation of consciousness. Each state of being or experience is coloured by different and higher perceptions. The process of maturity, or growing up and becoming aware of these different stages of energy, from gross to subtle, to causal and to transcendental, is known as shaktipat.

Regarding gurukripa, I do not think it is different from shakti or shaktipat, because it is the underlying factor motivating you as an individual to experience these different stages of shaktipat. Gurukripa is a factor that prepares you to move from Class A to Class B to Class C. Gurukripa does not allow stagnation to take place; you do not remain a five-year old for ninety years and study in the same kindergarten. In each stage there is a process that prepares you to move to some other level. This process, motivation or push is gurukripa, and the existence of gurukripa is not possible without shakti.

Shakti, shaktipat and gurukripa are three different experiences of the various aspects of the entire cosmic play. This entire cosmic play is like a football game being played by God and his companions. The football has three components or seams – shakti, shaktipat and gurukripa, and this is what spiritual life is all about. We talk about spiritual life in many different ways, but ultimately it all leads to these aspects of the cosmic play.

One can evolve through meditation up to a point. One can evolve through worship and prayer up to a point. One can evolve through spiritual practices and traditions up to a point. Beyond that, one has to become a willing subject of gurukripa, shaktipat and shakti.

If we have a religious tendency, what is it that makes us inclined towards either a feminine or a masculine symbol of God?

That is your head-trip. Yoga does not say anything about this because in yoga the concept of God is Ishwara, which is neither male nor female. *Ishwara* is the non-decaying principle, the unchanging reality. Human beings are known as *nashwara*, which means decayable persons or entities that decay. Yoga believes in these two concepts: *nashwara*, the changing, and *Ishwara*, the changeless.

For a yogi, God is neither male nor female, but *Ishwara*. *Ishwara* also represents the *nirakara* or unmanifest, aspect of divinity. We are unable to grasp anything beyond name, form and idea. Since we tend to evolve around these three concepts it is difficult for us to conceive of something that is unmanifest, so what do we do? According to our inclination, we give that unchangeable reality a name, a form, and an idea, an individual aspiration. Even in ancient times people worshipped different manifestations of nature as divinity. Some worshipped trees, rivers or mountains. Others worshipped fire, water, thunder, the sun and moon, etc. Many aspects of nature were adopted as representatives of divinity, something with which people could relate.

In the course of time, when our thoughts became more organized, we began to adopt the image of a man as being representative of divinity, and nature went far out of the picture. If we were asked to worship trees and rocks, rivers and mountains, the sun and moon, we would say, "What for?" Now our mentality has changed, and the object of attraction is a person, a figure, whether Jesus, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Mahavir, Shiva, or any other form of *ishta devata*.

If a person has religious tendencies, they must find out what kind of tendency it is, because religion in its true meaning aspires to unite an individual with the higher reality. The Latin root of the word religion means to unite. In order to achieve this unity there has to be a broad perception of the world in which we live, of the cosmos, of our interaction

with nature, and also of the changes happening within our personality. We have to experience the feeling of oneness, of compassion and love.

A few days ago I said, "It is not good enough just to be a Christian, one has to be a good Samaritan also." It is not good enough to be a follower of any religion, whether it be Islam or Hinduism. It is important that we imbibe the quality that we are looking for, the feeling of God, in our search for divinity. When this becomes the focal point, whether we are followers of Shiva or Shakti, the Islamic or the Christian tradition or any other tradition of the world, there should be a spontaneous desire to be open-minded and to have a broad vision which accepts the underlying truth in the entire manifest world.

As far as being attracted to male or female manifestations is concerned, that is very much an individual choice, and I do not see how it influences your awareness of religion. The attraction will only influence your awareness if there is closed-mindedness, if there is orthodoxy, fundamentalism in its negative form. Otherwise, it will not have any effect. If you are closed-minded and unable to accept the concepts and beliefs of another human being, and denounce any thing other than your own beliefs as wrong and unjust, then you will not be pursuing the real aim of religion in any sense.

Are there official mantras or chants to free spirits?

Different religious traditions have prescribed different mantras. Christianity, Buddhism, Islam and many different sects in India, such as the Shaiva, Shakta or the Brahmanical sects, have their own traditional prayers, and follow a particular system of thought. Within that system, different rituals, prayers, meditations and practices are given. One very famous system is *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. In this book, different ways of allowing the spirit to leave the body and attain a peaceful death and happier afterlife are described.

Yoga does not subscribe to those ideas. Yoga says, let every other 'ism' have its own form and way of governing spiritual life. One can live without them by leading a yogic life, where the attributes of consciousness are not seen; rather, the true nature of consciousness is seen. When you see the attributes of consciousness, there will be many areas where you may want to project yourself. There may be many attractions and attachments. One may be a total idiot and derive enjoyment out of being an idiot. One may be totally identified as a business person, computer scientist, sannyasin or whatever. There will be many attractions or identification with those attractions. In order to overcome that attraction, a particular prayer has to be said.

However, if we look at the original nature or qualities of consciousness without the attributes, then we only experience identification of self, fullness and completeness. Yoga says that once there is unity or oneness between spirit, freedom and the state of godhood or *Ishwaratvam*, where one becomes immortal, through higher awareness one can isolate those attractions so as not to be pulled or sucked in. This awareness and purity of mind has to be attained through pratyahara and dharana. Therefore, yoga does not advocate any mantra for the release of the spirit, except the shanti mantras, which represent the aim and direction of the natural process of evolution.

Could you please talk about the importance of patience and endurance in the context of 'be here now'?

The word for patience in Sanskrit is *dhairya*. *Dhairya* means something which you hold to yourself. When you are able to control your senses and mind it is known as *dhairya*. According to the Sanskrit definition patience means you are not affected by the conflicts created by the senses, but can maintain your equipoise without being influenced by the changing scenarios of the mind. That is the actual meaning of the word patience. When things get out of hand and there is a limit to how much control you have over yourself, it

becomes endurance, because you have to make an effort not to lose your grip but to continue on.

‘Being here now’ is something we very rarely experience. I think we live in the ‘here and now’ only for meals, dress and sleep, otherwise we spend most of the time shuttling back and forth between past and future – this happened in the past and this is going to happen in the future. We are constantly worried about the future and depressed about the past. Patience and endurance are the qualities that make you stay in the present, in the ‘now’. It is a short answer. There is no need to elaborate any further.

When we go and talk about spirituality and yoga to poor people in villages, they ask for a remedy for their poverty. How do we approach these people and tackle this problem?

Why do you think we teach yoga? Our sannyasa tradition is not yoga, it is Vedanta, but when our guru, Sri Swami Satyananda, was wandering he came across people who were trying to find a solution to their problems, who were obsessed by these problems, and who needed some relief from their suffering. They were definitely not going to listen to the precepts of Vedanta. Can you imagine yourself suffering from an acute attack of asthma and somebody telling you, “You are not this body, you are pure spirit”? How would you react? If it was me, I would give them a good slap and tell them to go away. I am sure your reaction would be similar.

Our Guruji felt very strongly that, for society at large, yoga was the best means to help people overcome their physical disabilities, diseases and afflictions; to help them attain a positive, relaxed and stress-free mind while simultaneously enabling them to grow spiritually. He considered yoga, with its integrated and holistic approach, to be more suitable for people than the principles and precepts of Vedanta.

Therefore, he took it upon himself to teach and preach yoga, and that is the work we have been doing. We do not speak of any philosophy whether Vedanta, Samkhya, tantra

or any other darshan except yoga, and when somebody asks specific questions about yoga and its effects on body, mind and spirit, we try to explain it.

Yoga is a very effective tool to gradually bring people to a better and more spiritual way of life. Apart from the practices of asana and pranayama for overcoming physical deficiencies, and pratyahara and dharana for helping overcome mental deficiencies and areas of blockage, there is also a code of life in the form of the *yama* and *niyama* or yogic discipline.

When the mind has been prepared by the practices of asana, pranayama, pratyahara and dharana, the *yama* and *niyama* are easily understood and imbibed. It is the *yama* and *niyama* which have guided the destiny of humanity. Those people who have lived a life of satya, ahimsa, asteya, aparigraha and brahmacharya, who have imbibed the rules of shaucha, santosha, tapa, swadhyaya and ishwara pranidhana, can achieve the ideal of integrating philosophy and action.

Hence it is not necessary to teach spirituality to people at large. Spirituality is something that cannot be taught, it is beyond the realm of intellect. The essence of spirituality must be felt in the spirit and not in the mind. Whatever you experience through the mind can always change. Just as our ideas, theories and beliefs change, our intellectual concept of spirituality can also change. Therefore, it is necessary to understand spirituality in a spiritual and not a socio-physical context. If you bring spirituality down to the level of the socio-physical dimension, it becomes a *sampradaya*, a cult or belief. If, however, you are able to understand spirituality in its true sense and can live it, it is a sign of spiritual attainment.

Yoga has been clear and firm in its conviction that we can, through self-effort, bring about a change in ourselves. We can change our personality, our lifestyle, our way of thinking and our aspirations and desires. To bring about this change, to go from the human to the divine dimension, we have the guidelines of *yama*, *niyama* and *dhyana*. Asana and

pranayama deal with the physical aspect of life. Pratyahara and dharana deal with the mental aspect, and yama, niyama and dhyana combined deal with the spiritual aspect, because in dhyana, we experience these realities within ourselves. There is no double standard. One does not play Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.

In the course of time, every practitioner of yoga, no matter what their aspiration, changes their views and begins to accept a lifestyle which incorporates some of the principles of spirituality. With that the journey begins. Rather than giving a long sermon to people it is better that you provide them with a practical system through which they can develop their own understanding to the maximum.

What is initiation?

The Sanskrit word for initiation is *diksha*, which means 'to see'. To see and experience a different reality, to experience different states of consciousness, is initiation.

Initiation can take many forms, and one should try not just to be initiated but to evolve through that initiation. The main theme of initiation is how to perfect each stage of growth and prepare for the experience which will follow with further initiation. In school, an exam has to be taken before you go to the next class. For one year you study, you prepare yourself for the exam, pass and move to the next class. These exams are similar to dikshas. When you are qualified, you move to the next level.

Of course, yogic dikshas are not like school initiations. In yoga we move from one state of mind to another. The process begins with mantra diksha, by which we develop willpower, mental clarity and concentration. Slowly we keep on evolving in this way until, finally, there is no difference between you and I, between me and the universe.

Can you tell us about Lord Shiva and what he symbolizes?

Lord Shiva has always been considered the founder of yoga. The image and symbol of Shiva is unique. *Shiva*

means auspicious being. The lifestyle of Shiva, who has been presented as an omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent being, is one of solitude and isolation in the mountains of Kailash. This means that, although one may be omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient, an awareness of the self has to be maintained, which can only be done in solitude and isolation, away from the influences and distractions of the senses and maya.

Shiva also represents harmony because in his family there are many opposing forces. The mount of Shiva is a bull, Nandi, and the mount of Shakti is a tiger. The mount of Ganesha, a son of Shiva, is a rat, while that of Kartikeya, another son, is a peacock. Around the body of Shiva are a large number of serpents. Now, all these different animals really hate each other. The snakes on Shiva's body are always eyeing the rat, waiting for an opportunity to strike and devour it. The peacock is always eyeing the snakes, which form Shiva's necklace, waiting for an opportunity to gobble one up. The tiger is always eyeing the bull, saying, "Okay, wait till you are alone and then I will show you what my power is." So, Shiva always has to maintain a balance between the members of his family.

On Shiva's head is a crescent moon which represents the *maha tattwa*, the manifestation of the individual mind, not the human mind, but the cosmic mind which is waxing and waning. From Shiva's matted locks flows the Ganga. Water symbolizes life. Therefore, the cosmic mind, the water of life and the ability to harmonize every opposing force are the qualities of Shiva.

Another aspect of Shiva is Trayambak Mahadev, the ishta devata of Sri Swamiji. This aspect has three heads, each having three eyes, representing the causal, subtle and gross manifestations of consciousness, the three dimensions of human existence and knowledge. The eyes represent tamas, rajas and sattwa. The third eye is sattwa. When sattwa awakens, rajas and tamas no longer have any place, but as long as the eye of sattwa remains closed we swing between

rajas and tamas. The rajasic and tamasic states represent the dualities of life, whereas sattwa represents its unity. The third eye is the symbol of the awakening of the sattwic nature.

Shiva is considered to be a god, a deity who has totally transcended every form of manifestation of prakriti or shakti, and is the essence of consciousness. Prakriti manifests in the form of different elements. When the shakti is burnt away and the tattwas are dissolved into one another, all that remains is ash, *bhasma*. Ash is the essence of the whole of creation.

The only element which can bring about transformation and destruction of the different elements is fire. Fire can burn the element earth. Fire has the power to evaporate water. Fire can be fanned by the power of wind. Fire burns in space; space is the container of fire. Thus, fire represents the cosmic force. Fire is also the symbol of Lord Shiva. Shiva wanders around cremation grounds where prakriti, maya and shakti are being consumed by the force of fire, where shakti is being converted into the pure essence of ash, the original tattwa.

In the life of sannyasins, Shiva represents transcendental consciousness beyond the world of name, form and idea. It is not necessary for anyone to identify with the symbol or image of Shiva; it will happen naturally and spontaneously as you evolve spiritually. I have found this to be true with many people in countries outside India who have never read about Shiva, and who have no concept of him. As they evolve, they see different images in their meditation. Sometimes it may be an open and awakened third eye, the trident, or even the image of Shiva himself.

Those who have really thought about it do not consider Shiva to be a religious or mystical figure or symbol. Rather, they consider him to be a representation of the nature of consciousness. In deeper states of meditation, as we begin to realize the nature of consciousness, the image of Shiva also manifests.

There was a person from Germany who had never been to India, knew nothing about India and was not interested in any kind of yogic system, philosophy or practice. One day

he went swimming in a river and was caught in the middle with cramps and nearly drowned. While he was going under he suddenly yelled, “Shiva save me!” Later on, he said that he did not even know the name he had shouted. After he had gone under and was nearly unconscious, he felt as if somebody or some force lifted him up and threw him on to the riverbank. There was nobody around for miles except for a few friends who were frantic on the other shore. Nobody had come forward to help. Therefore, for him this experience was something unique and mystical.

Later on, he came to India and began to make investigations about Shiva, the name that he had called out in desperation, and he told me this story. I believe that when he was going under, in his panic and fear he bypassed the cobwebs of the mind and went into the deeper mind. He had unconsciously tapped into that nature of consciousness, which had given him the force to be thrown out of the river on to the shore. Whether he did it himself or whether it was divine grace, he received this energy and was thrown to shore. It is possible that in the process of our own yogic sadhana we can reach a stage where, unconsciously, we tap into that source of energy and consciousness. It is a momentary experience.

There is also an example from Sri Swamiji’s life. I am going slightly off track, but it will give you an idea of how that consciousness manifests in life. During his *parivrajaka* or wandering days, he was passing through a town in Madhya Pradesh called Raigarh. He had not eaten for many days and had a splitting headache caused by hunger. He fainted in front of a church. When he came to, he found that a Belgian priest had taken him into the church and was caring for him. The priest gave him something to eat and drink and then Sri Swamiji left.

Fifteen years later, when the ashram was being established in front of that church, Sri Swamiji made enquiries about that Belgian priest. The caretakers and other priests in the church said, “In our history there has never been a Belgian priest

looking after this church.” Sri Swamiji said, “Impossible! I know the name, I know the date, I know the time when I met him, and I also remember what he gave me to eat. How can you say he never existed, that he has never been here and that you know nothing about him?” They swore that they were telling the truth. “In this church we have never had any Belgian priests; we have never had any white-skinned priests, only Indian priests.”

Even today Sri Swamiji talks about this event. He questions what happened. Maybe it was God Himself; maybe it was Jesus, another spirit, Shiva, Brahma, or Vishnu who had taken that form in order to save him when he was practically dying of hunger. These things can happen and they will always remain a mystery because there is no logic behind them. We can only say that some auspicious, caring force came, whether in human or spirit form.

What is transmission?

Some things must remain a mystery, and transmission is one of them. However, I will tell you something about transmission in the context of diksha. In yoga diksha there are three forms of initiation – initiation into name, mantra and sankalpa.

Mantra is an easy initiation because it can be given according to one’s zodiac sign. The giving of a name is more complicated because it involves having a feel for the person, observing them and seeing what their inner quality is. Previously, Sri Swamiji and I used to give names by post, but I have stopped that practice now. I do not give a spiritual name until I can see a person and feel them out. Receiving a name does not mean that you become a member of a yoga club. There is a purpose behind it and we have to recognize that purpose. A spiritual name represents the possibility of a quality manifesting in our life, and our attitude, lifestyle and efforts have to change accordingly.

The third form of diksha is sankalpa diksha, which means transmission. The ancient texts describe many forms of

transmission but shaktipat is the final one. Shaktipat is not something given in public. It takes place only when there is a very intimate connection and relationship between guru and disciple. It involves the transmission of the cosmic force which is within the guru and disciple.

There is a true story about Ramakrishna Paramahansa where he gave shaktipat to Swami Vivekananda by touching him on his forehead. In those days, Swami Vivekananda was not a sannyasin, he was just an ordinary student who used to go to visit Ramakrishna Paramahansa and who one day happened to ask him, "Have you seen God?" Ramakrishna Paramahansa replied, "Yes." Then Swami Vivekananda asked him, "Can you show God to me?" to which Ramakrishna again replied, "Yes." and touched him on the forehead. That was an instance of true shaktipat, because after that, the life of the student who had gone to see Ramakrishna Paramahansa out of curiosity changed completely. He emerged as a phoenix from the ashes in the form of Swami Vivekananda.

There have been other instances of shaktipat. It happened to Baba Muktananda via eye contact from his guru, Nityananda. Afterwards, Swami Muktananda went into a state of rigor mortis, stiffening of the body, for three days. This was what was seen externally. He could not move and his mind went on a trip, just through eye contact.

It happened to Swami Sivananda also when his guru gave him initiation into sannyasa. Before he became a swami he was just wandering around, searching for a direction, when suddenly a sadhu appeared, an acharya of the Saraswati order, Swami Vishwananda Saraswati. He did not even ask Swami Sivananda what he was looking for or why he was wandering. He simply said, "I have come here to give you sannyasa." Thereupon he gave him sannyasa and left. It was his one and only encounter with his guru. Swami Sivananda never met his guru again. After this initiation into sannyasa, when the geru dhoti was officially being placed on him, Swami Sivananda says that the moment the cloth touched

him he had a vision of Lord Krishna standing in front of him as if it was Krishna himself who was putting the cloth around him. He says, “I did not see any human form, only the image of Krishna.”

After that transmission, Swami Sivananda’s whole life changed. He became Siva, a realized being, the moment he was initiated. He was not a seeker any more. That moment of ecstasy continued throughout his life until the day of his physical departure. If you could have seen Swami Sivananda the first day after his initiation and the last day before he left the body you would have seen no difference whatsoever, there was just one straight line of God-consciousness all the way through. The same thing happened between Swami Sivananda and his disciple Swami Satyananda, right here on top of this hill we call Ganga Darshan, before the establishment of this ashram.

Sri Swamiji has described this event many times. In 1963 he was meditating here. In those days this place was a very isolated, dacoit-infested spot. Nobody came here, therefore it was totally silent. One day at about four o’clock in the evening, he had the vision of Swami Sivananda crossing the river Ganga in a paddle steamer. A spray of water coming from one of the wheels drenched Sri Swamiji. When he opened his eyes his clothes were actually wet. It had not rained. There was not a cloud in the sky. From where did that water come? Nobody was around; nobody could have thrown a bucket of water on him. How did he become physically drenched? There is no answer to that, but Sri Swamiji knew that Swami Sivananda had passed on his energy to him. That is another example of shaktipat. Shaktipat or transmission is a living thing, a mental process.

Another aspect of shaktipat is *bhakti*, devotion, which exists between guru and disciple. Even though Swami Sivananda only saw his guru once, maybe for half an hour or so, he was always a disciple. He never claimed to be a self-made person. He lived with affection and devotion for his guru. Sri Swamiji still considers himself to be a disciple,

and if you talk to him about Swami Sivananda, his whole being begins to radiate with love and affection, which he experiences deep in his heart. It is a very intimate and pure inner feeling.

In the absence of devotion I do not think shaktipat can take place. Devotion is not sitting glassy-eyed in front of the master and saying how great he is, no! Devotion is the connection of two hearts, when the bodies are two, but the spirit is one. When the directions may be two, but the mind one, this is bhakti. This is devotion.

Therefore, the whole concept of transmission is a mystery. Nobody can define it. Nobody can talk about it. You may feel it, a momentary flash can be had but you have to make an effort to hold it there permanently, and it can only be held permanently if you are linked in heart, mind and spirit with the guru. This process and understanding happens through sankalpa diksha.

Can you help me to manage my ego? I am inspired with great love for you. This brings my expectations for initiation and the desire for affection and recognition, but I realize this is just my ego.

The best way to manage the ego is to develop bhakti. *Bhakti* is devotion, not directed to a particular person but to your own inner being. Also try to develop simplicity and sincerity. I guess what has happened to you happens to many people. Sometimes people are inspired and that inspiration later leads to dependency and the desire for affection and recognition. Sometimes it also leads to feelings of rejection and pain. These are different manifestations of ego in relation to oneself.

The most important thing is the purity of your inspiration. Even in times of difficulty, when you are suffering and in pain, or when you have been rejected, think of that which inspired and guided you originally and derive continued strength from that. This is more important than any form of initiation. Initiation can become a process of helping oneself

maintain that inner inspiration, but at the same time every aspirant should make an attempt to hold on to that initial inspiration with simplicity and sincerity of heart.

In the life of Sri Swamiji there have been many different events, and of all the good things that have happened to him and that he has attained, he has never forgotten the moment of his first inspiration: the moment when he surrendered himself to his guru, Swami Sivananda. He says, "That is also the most beautiful moment of my life which I have always cherished and which I will continually hold close to me, the moment when I made my connection with Swami Sivananda and surrendered myself to him. I allowed him to sculpt me the way he thought fit."

The inspiration of connection, of coming together, of uniting, of progressing, of faith and of trust is more important than any kind of attainment or achievement in spiritual life. Attainment and achievement is the end of something, but inspiration is an ongoing, continuous process. Therefore, every spiritual aspirant, every spiritual seeker, regardless of whether they are initiated or not, must hold this image of inspiration in their hearts all the time. This is the only way to eventually overcome the ego.

Please tell us about the awareness a sannyasin should have, whether living in an ashram or outside.

There is only one kind of awareness a sannyasin should have and that is self-observation. Self-observation, if done with an open attitude and without creating narrow-mindedness, can become a very strong and ideal support for being aware of our interaction with the people around us, with society and the world, and also with the universe.

The process of self-observation begins with educating the mind, which is very important if we wish to change the nature of our samskaras. When the nature of our samskaras is changed, then our actions and thoughts also change. Self-observation is necessary in order to create this change, and a sannyasin should definitely try to have this ability, because

it will mean the completion of the spiritual journey in one lifetime.

People like Yogananda and Ramakrishna had an intense desire to realize God. Why do we not also have this? Is it necessary, and how do we get it?

Stop comparing yourself with others! When we are in the 'have not' category we should not compare ourselves with those who have all. Everyone's karmas are different and it is according to one's karma that the direction of life is decided. In this life you perform karma, the result of which is known as *sanchita*, accumulated, karma. The manifestation of these karmas later on in this or the next life is known as *prarabdha*, determined, karma.

If we look at the lives of various saints, masters and gurus we can see a very strong manifestation of *prarabdha* karma. Ramana Maharshi had very intense *vairagya*, detachment, from the world. He left home at a very early age and never looked back. Shankaracharya had a most distinct and distinguished karma. He left home at the age of eight and became a sannyasin and one of the greatest luminaries of India. Swami Vivekananda also had very strong spiritual karmas. Many of us have very strong karmas too, but we are not aware of the direction in which they are taking us. We are struggling in life; physically, mentally, emotionally, psychically, externally and internally, and in the course of our struggle we are accumulating karmas.

If you consider people like Ramakrishna, Yogananda, Ramana Maharshi, Baba Nityananda, Swami Sivananda and Sri Swamiji, you will see how their karmas have made their destiny. If by some grace or shaktipat we come to that point, then we can have the same experience, the same intense urge to realize God which they had.

However, until we are able to stop the accumulation of karmas we will continue to go through different head-trips. So, do not even try to be like Ramakrishna or Yogananda. You can never be like them, and if you try you will be wasting

your time. Just try to be yourself and work out your own karmas. Who knows, in a hundred years you may be greater than them! That possibility always exists.

How does one get close to the guru? What qualities does he or she need to acquire?

In order to get close to the guru you need to have the qualities of a perfect disciple, but there is one thing you should take into consideration. Why do you think the guru is far away in the first place, that you want to become closer to him? In what sense? Physically? Then you can find a way I am sure. With any pretext or work one can go in front of the guru, this will definitely bring you physically close. However, if it is closeness of the heart you want then it is not necessary to be in the vicinity of the guru.

I have never had this problem because I have never wanted to be close to Sri Swamiji. Even when he asked me, "Will you come to India to take over the institution?" I said, "No!" He was taken aback, but I never had any desire to be close to him physically, and when people talk about being close to their guru I cannot understand that mentality at all. For me, guru lives in my heart and in my spirit. If I get an opportunity to be close physically that is a bonus. If the disciple has surrendered to the guru then it is their duty to sacrifice their individuality for the sake of the guru. They should become a proper instrument, a tool in the hands of the guru.

Therefore, I see a lot of selfishness in this question. Such selfishness is not acceptable in the relationship between guru and disciple. If you are sincere then you have to sacrifice something. On the one hand you say, "Let Thy will be done", on the other hand you say, "But also consider my will first." What kind of surrender is that? What kind of sacrifice is that? What kind of feeling is that for the guru? Definitely you cannot expect your individual desires to be fulfilled within the larger mission of the guru.

If you feel that your individual desires are more important, then do not make anybody your guru. Just be a

friend to that person and you remain free to make your own decisions and choices. If that person happens to become your guru, not because he wanted it, but because you wanted it, then it is your duty to fulfil the conditions of discipleship. To fulfil the conditions of discipleship is not easy. Many people like to become gurus overnight but very few can remain disciples.

In order to get close to your guru, first be a fit disciple and then worry about how to come close.

Can we see the psychic level at which a person stands? Is it possible to know the location of our kundalini after having gained an elementary knowledge during the kriya yoga course?

Before you actually experience anything you have to attain a certain level of sensitivity. The pranic and subtle bodies or koshas are only experienced by aspirants after they have been able to sensitize the perception on the subtle dimension. In the elementary practices of kriya yoga it is definitely not possible. There are many veils which have to be removed before the pranic and subtle bodies are seen.

The most important thing here is your commitment to the practice of the kriyas. Swami Sivananda used to say, and still says through me, “One ounce of practice is better than tons of theory.” The *Yoga Sutras* state that a practice done regularly and with faith for an extended period of time prepares the ground for higher realization. There are three concepts here: one, regularity, continuing without a break; two, doing the practice for an extended period of time, allowing the practice to purify, harmonize and balance the inner structure of the personality; and three, faith, having the conviction that eventually one will experience the fruits of the practice.

It is also necessary to separate the mind from the practice. Now, you may ask what it means to separate the mind from the practice. You have to realize that the mind needs constant stimulation, and if you repeat something day in and day out, then definitely after some time the mind is

going to say, “Enough!” and start looking for something new, better and faster. When this happens, a barrier is created in your receptivity to the practices. The moment you begin to think about something else, the mental tuning is lost.

You have to tune into a practice, just like you tune into a radio station. Unfortunately, you do not have FM stations, only short waves. FM can only be attained after you reach sahasrara. But in the short wave system there are many conflicting radio waves; you have to be very precise in tuning the mind to the frequencies of prana, chakra, kundalini, consciousness, nature, the external environment, and also to the pressures that are around you in the family, at work and so on. The moment you are properly tuned and there is harmony, without any extreme conditions in the immediate environment to disturb your peace of mind, then the benefits of the practice will be experienced.

Kriya yoga in itself is not important, kundalini yoga is also not important. What is important is your ability to maintain regularity of practice. In the course of time, as you progress, you will be able to feel the level of your inner awakening intuitively. But please remember that the mind has to be isolated from the practice. It is one commitment which you have to make to yourself.

What has more importance in spiritual life: doing one's duty to oneself or to others?

What I want personally and where my obligations lie, are two different things. Sometimes there is no conflict between my personal desires and my external obligations, but if there is conflict between what I want and what I have to do, then it is better in spiritual life to do one's duty first and then look after one's needs.

In worldly life you are free to do as you wish. You can jump into the well for all anyone cares, but in spiritual life it is understood that you have come with a desire to become aware of and follow dharma, and if you are not able to understand dharma in spiritual life, you are not progressing

at all. Therefore, spiritual life is based on the understanding of dharma, and it is this understanding which can advance you spiritually.

When someone in the ashram is a very capable, strong and efficient manager, but at the same time expresses dominating and bullying tendencies towards others, creating various problems for the residents, how should one deal with the situation?

Only a few days ago Sri Swamiji answered this question. He said that he has never treated anyone as a disciple but only as a friend. If he had wanted he could have said, “Don’t do this, don’t do that, be like this, be like that!” but I cannot think of a single moment when such words came out of his mouth. He has never said to anyone in harsh tones, “You should have done it like this, or you should not have done it like that.” No, rather, even when mistakes were made, he helped everyone like a friend, and it is this quality of friendliness towards others which should be developed by people in the ashram. Then they will find that even the most arrogant manager of the ashram will play a gentle tune on the flute when it comes to them.

People always look at and criticize how other people are behaving, trying to dominate others, trying to do this, and trying to do that, but just by seeing this, we create a distance between those people and ourselves. If I see somebody who is arrogant and dominating and I recognize that he is being arrogant towards me, I am reacting to it. But if I am able to maintain an attitude of friendliness to him then I am sure that, in the course of time, that arrogance, that ego, that hardness will not affect me. Maybe with my behaviour and approach I will even one day be able to change that person’s life.

Therefore, an important thing is that instead of always seeing how other people are, we should learn to see ourselves and how we respond and react to situations. Many problems can then be avoided and at least peace and harmony can be maintained. That is important.

If the world is maya, what is the meaning of life?

I will tell you that when I know the meaning of my life. I do not know the meaning of life now. I only have an intellectual understanding of it. I can say that the meaning of life is to attain perfection. I can tell you many things about it, but do I know what perfection is? No, I do not. If I were to say “I know what perfection is”, then I would be limiting the concept of perfection. Perfection is an ongoing process, just as evolution is an ongoing process.

Maya is when you forget who and what you are and begin to identify with the petty things of life; when you lose your vision and aim. Suppose you love and respect somebody and they suddenly say to you, “What the hell are you doing here? Who are you?” What happens? Immediately you react: Why was I told that? Am I not fit? Am I not meant to be around? That is maya. Head-trips are maya. Head-tripping for petty things is maya. You will have to wait a long time before you know the meaning of life.

Please speak to us about karma yoga.

Karma yoga is a very big subject, and to understand it one has to first understand what karma is. Karma is generally taken to be action and interaction, but the actual meaning is knowledge of the ongoing interaction that is happening on every level of the human personality. When you gain a deeper knowledge of the interactions, you also gain the ability to harmonize the reactions that arise out of any action. That is the purpose and meaning of karma yoga. Karma yoga does not only happen in an ashram, it happens everywhere in the world.

Why has the word ‘yoga’ been added to the word ‘karma’? Karma means performance of action, whether through the body, senses, mind, intellect or emotions. The moment we add the word ‘yoga’ it means harmony, harmony in every kind of action that is being performed. Of course, those uninitiated into the process of karma yoga have to begin by developing selfless attitudes and viewpoints. These can be

misused by many people in order to manipulate others, but if you are sincere to yourself then you will understand that a proper performance of karma yoga leads to immunity from the chain of cause and effect, from the influence of action and reaction.

Karma yoga implies that we are aware from moment to moment of everything we do. That is one requirement of karma yoga – total awareness. The second requirement of karma yoga is to observe the reactions and harmonize them. If somebody asks you to sweep the floor and you get angry, observe that anger and harmonize that anger. Harmonize your own personality. The moment you are able to harmonize your reactions you will know that you are perfecting the process of karma yoga.

Regarding speech, criticism of others is karma while non-criticism is karma yoga. Regarding thought, thinking negative, bad and destructive thoughts is karma but not being affected by them and balancing them out is karma yoga. Regarding emotions, the manifestation of anger, hatred, jealousy, fear and insecurity is normal karma, but managing them with clarity of mind is karma yoga. Karma yoga is harmony, balance, equilibrium in everything that one does in life, whether physically, mentally, emotionally, intellectually, psychically, spiritually, universally or individually. In all dimensions, there should be harmony.

Karma yoga goes hand in hand with jnana yoga, knowledge. You cannot isolate karma yoga from jnana yoga. Knowledge, understanding, awareness, these are required in order to perfect karma yoga. Once you are able to combine jnana yoga with karma then you are practising karma yoga.

Is there any difference between yoga and music? Why are musical instruments used in yoga classes? In what way are they helpful for the human body, mind and self-realization?

Music definitely has a very vital role to play in our life. Music has been assigned a specific place of respect in the

form of nada yoga, because the seers and yogis have always believed that the human body is essentially composed, not of bone, muscle, marrow, etc., but of vibrations. The neuro-cellular and the atomic structure of the body are composed of energy and vibration which can be influenced by different frequencies.

There are different frequencies governing our physical, mental, emotional and psychic bodies, but how can we come into tune with the frequencies that govern the entire personality? It is not possible to tune oneself to the frequencies of energy through logic or buddhi. Neither is it possible to realize them through the intellect or emotions. The only way to realize and to be in tune with the frequencies of the human personality is through music, nada yoga.

Nada means eternal sound or primordial vibration, and it is represented on the Indian musical scale by the notes *sa, re, ga, ma, pa, dha, ni, sa*. The corresponding musical notes of the Western system are, *do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti, do*. When these notes are played correctly the energy in the body is affected positively. Each chakra in the body is controlled by a specific frequency of sound vibration. The chakras are also related with the energy field and specific states of consciousness.

Classical music of any kind, whether Eastern or Western, induces a particular state of consciousness. If you listen to rock, jazz or rap, then your mind will not be as peaceful and quiet as normal. Try meditating with jazz, rap or rock music. You will not be able to do so because they contain frequencies which activate and extrovert the mind. Then there are the musical forms which pacify the mind. These are the two forms known in the world today; one that activates the mind and one that pacifies the mind.

Nada yoga does not belong to either of these two categories of activating and pacifying, but to a third category – awakening of the mind. You will need to study kundalini yoga and nada yoga in depth in order to understand the role of music in your life.

Why must man go through physical and psychic pain to reach God?

Happiness comes after suffering. If you find happiness without first experiencing suffering then you will not appreciate that happiness at all. Pleasure comes after pain, and if you find it without first experiencing pain there will be no appreciation for it. For example, consider the experience of hunger and filling the stomach. Why does one have to feel hunger? In order to avoid hunger we can keep on eating every hour, but then we will have to suffer the consequences.

Without pain and suffering there cannot be any advancement in life. Every seer and saint in the world has said it. Swami Sivananda used to sing a song, "Nature throws a man into the crucible of pain in order to turn him into a sublime superman." If we look at the lives of the saints we shall find similar sentiments echoed everywhere. This has been their experience. The desire to overcome pain and suffering only comes when there is suffering and pain in the first place. The moment you are able to overcome that pain, that suffering, you will attain happiness.

Pain and suffering are the realities of life. Pleasure is not a reality of life. Happiness is not a reality of life. That is a fact. If you can adjust to pain, the moment of adjustment will become the moment of happiness and pleasure. If you are able to understand suffering, the moment of understanding will become the moment of pleasure and happiness. This is what Sri Swamiji has said many times in many ways – learn to adjust to pain in order to find pleasure.

In spiritual life we have to go through pain in order to find our inner self. There is a lot of pain caused by the breaking down of barriers, ideas and beliefs. In order to experience something which is beyond ideas, beliefs and barriers, there must be a process of breaking down, so there is bound to be pain and suffering. One has to understand it, adapt and adjust to it.

I would like to feel internally that you care about me, because that gives me the inspiration and strength in my work and life, otherwise, everything seems to lose its meaning and I am full of self-destructive thoughts which lead me to a dead end.

Unfortunately, I do not agree with this at all. This statement shows a lack of understanding on behalf of the questioner.

When two people like each other they know that the feeling is deep in the heart, but sometimes the external situations create a conflict and they begin to identify with these situations. The real feeling of love and affection then becomes suppressed, because of over-identification with external events. Just because a fight takes place externally, does it mean that the love and affection has disappeared from life? Just because clouds cover the sun in the sky does it mean that the sun has disappeared from the heavens? Some clouds may be very thick and big and last for months, whereas some may just be little wisps which disappear after a few moments.

If a link of trust, love and affection has been made, then how can one lose that link due to external situations? This shows an immaturity of mind and a lack of understanding. I know that my guru loves me but if he says one harsh word to me, does it mean his love for me is finished? Was it that superficial that it could disappear due to one hard word? No, I cannot accept that. We have shared something deeper and more intimate, which is in the form of love, affection and faith, and definitely, no external circumstances can remove that impression which is very intimate and deep. When the clouds pass, the sun will shine again.

You have to understand that the inner connection is more important than the outer one. If you look at the outer connections, of course there is going to be suffering and pain. The whole world suffers because it identifies with the outer connection, and because of external identification, inner understanding is lost instantaneously. If you want to tread the path of yoga, if you want to tread the path

of sannyasa, if you want to tread the path of spiritual life, you will have to make an effort to evolve out of this way of thinking.

You have described some effects of kriya yoga which do not sound very nice. It seems that if we continue the practices we run the risk of becoming sex maniacs with burnt-out brains, trying to cope with normal society. An ashram is therefore probably the best place to perform the kriyas, but this will not be possible for some of us. You say you will help, but you will be a long way away. If anything negative does happen, what should we do?

You are right that I have described the negative aspects of kriya yoga, and today I will describe the positive aspects. However, always keep in mind the things that can go wrong so that you are careful from the very beginning. If I were only to tell you the good things that can happen and not the bad I would be like a salesman.

When I went to America, I landed in New York City with only sixty-eight dollars in my pocket and I did not know anyone. So in order to earn money I became a salesman of yoga and did not sell my product at all. They expected me to tell them all the good things about the product and I used to tell them all the bad things. I used to say, "Anything that I have not mentioned is good." I am not interested in the quantity of practitioners I have, I am only interested in their quality. I am interested in people who can apply the theories, concepts and practices, and not just sit 'starry-eyed' waiting for something good to happen as I had mentioned in one of my talks.

Human nature and the mind are very intricate. If you think you have understood yourself then I am very happy for you, but if I ask you "Have you understood yourself?" what will the correct and sincere answer be? Do you know your mind? Do you understand prana and its positive and negative manifestations? The answer will be, "No, I don't know."

There has to be some form of balance in your approach to the different yoga practices. How do you achieve this balance? By knowing the things that can go wrong with your personality in the process of practice. You know that fire burns, but because fire burns have you stopped using it? No. You are careful because you have developed an instinctive response.

In yoga, you have to develop an instinctive response based on knowledge, *jnana*. I think this is the most important point in yoga, instinctive response based on *jnana*. Once you are aware of the pros and cons of a practice, then your knowledge of how to handle different conflicting situations will grow and you will not have to think, “Oh, this has happened, what am I to do now?” This is what I am trying to make you aware of by telling you that negative things do happen, and can happen in the absence of a proper understanding of our own nature. In the practices of kundalini yoga you are dealing with your deeper nature, not the superficial, manifest nature.

I have already explained that the yogic concept of human personality consists of *annamaya*, *pranamaya*, *manomaya*, *vijnanamaya* and *anandamaya kosha*. We relate only with *annamaya kosha* and have no understanding of *pranamaya*, *manomaya*, *vijnanamaya* or *anandamaya kosha*. Of these five areas we only relate to one, the remaining four being unknown to us. We may have some superficial concept of them, but it is not an experiential understanding. Therefore, in the absence of experience it is advisable to be aware of the things that can go wrong, so that we can be careful from the very beginning. I do not mean to frighten anyone.

Now, I will tell you the positive aspects of *kriya yoga*. First let us look at it from the pranic viewpoint, the second dimension of the personality – *pranamaya kosha*. Activation of the pranic force leads to the development of healing abilities, the pranic energy being used to heal the wounds of mind and emotions.

The benefits of *manomaya kosha* are greater clarity of thought, balanced expression of emotion, reduction of ego,

deeper understanding of different conditions and situations, and a greater manifestation of creativity in the realm of *buddhi*, intelligence and *kriya*, action.

As we go deeper into the benefits of vijñanamaya kosha, the tamasic and rajasic tendencies automatically become less, and there is clarity of unconditioned cognition. With this clarity you begin to experience the subtle, expressive nature of transcendental consciousness and there comes a point when siddhis begin to manifest naturally and spontaneously.

There are different positive, creative and sattvic results of the practices of kriya yoga. As you come to the different dimensions of your personality, you will find new creative expressions which are more conducive to your inner transformation of consciousness. Still I would advise caution. You have to develop strength in order to deal with the power of the waves which you will meet on the surface of the ocean, the mind. You have to develop knowledge of the path in order to deal with the states that manifest when the external cognitive faculties stop and the inner cognitive faculties begin to manifest.

You should not be afraid of my caution; rather, you should understand it to be a reality of life. Normally you identify more with the extreme conditions and situations and less with the balanced and more harmonious ones. You think that if you are balanced and harmonious, if you are not experiencing any chronic effects on the mind, you are not progressing at all, because we are expecting something extreme to happen.

Only this morning somebody was telling me, “In my family, everyone gets this and that kind of vision in meditation, but I have not been able to experience any kind of visions in my practice. Why?” “Well,” I said, “the only answer is that your family members are going to extremes. One day they see the devil, the next day they see angels. You are going in the right direction, because you are not moving in extremes. You are progressing because you have greater

concentration and one-pointedness.” That person was not willing to accept my answer. So what can I do?

If I say that through the practice of kriya yoga you will be able to read other people’s thoughts and see things that are happening thousands of miles away, tomorrow everyone will be in the class hoping to attain instant siddhis like tele-transportation of the body – “Beam me up, Scotty” and we are in some other place. But if I say you will become sex maniacs with burnt-out brains, I do not think even one person would attend the class due to fear. Extremes like this do not occur often, but it is good to be aware that they can happen.

Can you explain why jnana yoga and karma yoga go together?

Karma yoga, jnana yoga and bhakti yoga complement one another. If you practise only jnana yoga, there is the possibility of an intellectual crisis.

The *Ishavasya Upanishad* states that ignorance definitely leads to darkness but that knowledge can lead to even greater darkness. If jnana yoga remains an intellectual process it will not yield any result. Jnana has to become an experience; it should not be a mere process of accumulating intellectual knowledge. Jnana is a process of applying knowledge. We have to apply what we know to our lives and not just cram our mind and brain with information. This will neither change our attitudes, behaviours and actions nor create a qualitative change in our lives. Therefore, please remember that jnana yoga is not accumulation but the proper application of knowledge.

The word *jnana* means knowledge, but when we add the word ‘yoga’ it takes on a different meaning – harmony of knowledge. If there is harmony and balance, then knowledge can be applied in the right way. Before and after jnana, however, comes karma. Karma is the instinctive action which we perform day in and day out. Our thoughts, feelings, physical movements, interactions and convictions are all

karma. Karma is an action that is taking definite shape in us to channel the forces of our personality in a specific direction.

When we add the word 'yoga' to the word 'karma', it means harmony of karma. Harmony implies that there is an awareness of and discrimination towards what we are doing. There is an understanding of how our karma is affecting our action, behaviour, attitude and projections, and also of how it is affecting other people. If it is affecting someone else in a negative way then it is not harmonious. Therefore, you have to look at the concept of the word yoga, meaning harmony, and then relate this harmony to karma, jnana and bhakti.

In my opinion, karma comes first, jnana comes second and bhakti comes third. Karma happens naturally and spontaneously, but there is an absence of knowledge and awareness regarding karma. The moment we develop awareness and knowledge of karma there is jnana. Jnana in its final stage gives birth to bhakti. Here, bhakti means faith, conviction and the absence of ego. If ego manifests then one is not a bhakta.

There is a Hindi word, *ghamand*, which describes a combination of three negative ego experiences: vanity, pride and arrogance. Ghamand is when the concept of 'I' and 'me' negates everything and everyone. It is self-centredness in a very tamasic sense; aggressiveness, megalomania. The absence of this egomania is bhakti. In the first stage of bhakti it is not necessary to start thinking about God, Krishna and Christ. No, that identification with either the manifest form, *sakara*, or the unmanifest form, *nirakara*, happens much later, when the merging of consciousness takes place. In the initial stages there is the dropping of egomania, which in turn leads to bhakti.

Could you please explain why, when I am in a room with a person with a particularly negative vibration, I enter into very deep sleep and have nightmares? What can I do

about this? It does not happen when I am alone. It can also happen when there is no one in the room, just a negative vibration.

Similar things have happened to me. I always sleep alone. Once I was giving a program in another town in India and I was staying in a hotel. At night I had horrible dreams of murder, theft, robbery, guns, and knives – horrible nightmares! The next day I asked the manager, “Who was the occupant of my room before I came here?” He replied, “A police inspector.” So I changed my room.

It also happened in France and Holland. The first night in the French hotel I was staying at was such a nice night! I was holidaying in my dreams – festivities, dancing, drinking beer, something I have never done in my life! It was an incredible night. When I woke up in the morning I felt that I had danced the whole night. From that experience, I figured that the previous occupants had been people who had gone there for pleasure and a vacation and had done all those things. Therefore, I can definitely say that previous occupants leave behind their vibrations in a room.

There is another factor also. Many times we create our own vibrations, and we are not aware that we are creating them. If we are in a state of anxiety, tension or frustration, or have had a disturbing fight with somebody near and dear, we create a negative impression within ourselves at night because the disturbing effects of the day are being released in the form of dreams. The negative environment we have created in our own mind is seen as nightmares and disturbing, distracting images. Therefore, you must be able to tell what is your own creation and what was there before, because most of the time we create our own fears, dreams and nightmares. We do not have the ability to realize that we are creating negativity within us, nor do we have the ability to handle the negative forces within our subconscious and unconscious mind.

I have advised many people to use their mantra at night to help them overcome their fears and anxieties, and to

pacify the disturbed energies in the environment. This way it becomes possible to have a good night's sleep. I suggest that if you have such feelings again, just try to be aware of your mantra and create a positive environment around yourself.

How does the annual death ceremony help the departed soul?

Unfortunately, I am not a priest and therefore cannot answer this question. I do not have the faintest idea. However, I do know that in every culture and tradition, certain rituals have been prescribed in the month after death to bring peace to the departed soul. That first month is the most crucial period for the soul, because a transition has to take place from the world where that soul lived into another world to which it is not accustomed, the dimension of spirit. Not the inner spirit but the external spirit.

Rituals, in the form of mantra chanting and offering one's affection and love, encourage, support and guide the departed soul so that it can experience peace and bliss. I have never been able to understand why such rituals are conducted after one or two years. It seems to me that I could be conducting a ritual on the death anniversary for the peace of a departed soul that might have already taken birth three months ago.

We do not know the laws that govern life. We can only speculate. It is quite possible that a spirit leaves one body, immediately finds another 'hotel', and goes into that hotel for nine months. Therefore, the ceremony that I am conducting after twelve months is already three months late. It is better not to even think about these things because they belong to the realm and laws of nature and divinity.

Therefore, according to my understanding, the ceremonies that are performed in the first month are the important ones. Anything that is performed afterwards is just a way of expressing our love and support in memory of the departed one.

Was the tantric yogini who gave Sri Swamiji his highest experiences, which he says he is now trying to get on his own, on a very high level to be able to induce the experiences? Why do the higher tantric practices require meat and drink? Is it to enable the body to cope with the great energy?

I have never met the tantric yogini, so I do not know if she was high or whether she was an ordinary human being, but Sri Swamiji said that she had a lot of knowledge. Einstein's teacher was not as famous as Einstein, nor was he a nuclear physicist, but Einstein became famous. Does that mean that the teacher was at the same level or at a higher level than Einstein himself? If so, then why does the credit not go to Einstein's teacher rather than to Einstein? The answer is that the teacher only lays the foundation. The tantric yogini gave a foundation to Sri Swamiji and he was able to make use of that foundation in her presence, and to have that experience while under her guidance.

We do not know of the events that took place before Sri Swamiji became a sannyasin. When the tantric yogini met him he was just an ordinary person, walking down the road. We do not know what she taught him or what he did. He has not mentioned it. She told him to bring her wine and meat, which she consumed. That does not mean that she made Sri Swamiji eat it. She gave him the theory and knowledge of the chakras, and through certain practices of meditation, kriya yoga and tantric transmissions she was able to generate a high experience in him. However, Sri Swamiji had his own samskaras, karmas and destiny. Did they not play a role in this? He had been having spiritual experiences from the age of six onwards, meaning there were basic samskaras and karmas leading him to fulfil a destiny different from a normal person. The yogini might just have been the final catalyst to make him aware of this destiny.

When Ramakrishna Paramahansa touched the forehead of Swami Vivekananda, Swami Vivekananda had a vision of God. That was the guru's grace, or *guru kripa*, as we call it.

Did Swami Vivekananda have the same experience later on? Nowhere in his biography do we find another event which induced that same experience. When the yogini gave Sri Swamiji the experience of spirituality she was the medium through which transmission took place. If he says that he is now trying to have the same high experience at will, he means he does not have to depend on the grace of a guru.

There are different aspects of tantra. In the Shakta system in which Devi is worshipped, meat is eaten, while in the Bhairava system in which Rudra is worshipped, wine is drunk. In the Shaiva system, isolation in remote areas is required, for example, a cremation ground or deep in the mountains. These sadhanas involve yajnas and mantras. In the Vaishnava system, the lifestyle is totally different. This yogini was a practitioner of the Shakta system where awakening of the kundalini and the experience of shakti consumes the physical body's energy. That is why yogis sometimes use ganja and other hallucinatory drugs; intoxication takes them beyond their immediate physical awareness. In akharas they have a heavy diet, drinking two to three litres of ghee every day. It is very heavy for the body and they consume it through the heat of prana.

Tantric spirituality takes on different dimensions at different times. When Ramakrishna practised Christian sadhana, he was baptized by a Christian priest and lived the life of a devout Christian. At the end of the sadhana, the fasting and prayers, he had the actual vision of Christ. He then became a follower of Islam and lived, ate and performed sadhana just like an orthodox Muslim, a mullah, and he had the vision of Mohammed. Then he became a Shakta. He used to drink and perform the Shakta sadhanas and he had the vision of Kali. Then he became something different. Whatever religion he followed, whether he practised tantra, yoga, Sufism, Islam or Christianity, ultimately, he retained his own nature. So with people who have attained some level of realization and understanding, it is very difficult to say what their actions actually mean.

Definitely, at the time of kundalini or pranic awakening body heat increases. There have been cases of automatic combustion too, where excessive heat just burns up the body, but that only happens at a very high level of sadhana. It will not happen at our level of sadhana which is very balanced and systematic. However, if you practise advanced kundalini kriyas for three years alone in the high mountains, doing rigorous bhastrika eight thousand times a day and tadan kriya, who knows what will happen? For that kind of advanced sadhana you need a special diet.

This rule applies to yoga too. As you become more and more advanced and perfect in meditation you have to change your diet. There are times when you practise pranayama and you have to live on milk and fruits alone. At such times you must not worry about your body weight, "I am getting thin, what should I do? I am feeling weak, what should I do?" No, nothing like that. These are very hard disciplines which are not generally taught; nor do we teach them here. Hard disciplines are only taught to people with a different mentality who can handle the rigorous awakening of the shakti within.

Can you give us some advice regarding our relationships?

Whomever you choose as a partner, husband or wife, friend, guru, or disciple, no matter what the relationship, it is important that you both share the same goal if you want the relationship to be successful, happy and uplifting. If you cannot share the same goal then whatever the relationship, whether it be a guru-disciple, husband and wife or friend-friend relationship, nothing is going to work out. There is always going to be conflict, suffering and pain. So, in my opinion, and speaking from a novice's point of view, sharing the same goal is more important than worrying about the other hassles that may come up from time to time.

Your goals should not be superficial. They should be the aim of life, towards which you work together. In your pursuit of this goal there has to be understanding

and discrimination. The ability to understand is a very great quality. Understanding is something which we tend to ignore throughout life, but if we have the quality to understand situations that are created both within ourselves and others, then awareness and the sharing of a common goal becomes easy.

Can you explain how suffering is an aid on the spiritual path?

Suffering and pleasure can help us, both, advance in spiritual life and take us away from it. The entire process of your spiritual life depends on your attitude and awareness. Unfortunately, human tendency is to not be aware of one's shortcomings and limitations during periods of pleasure and happiness. When pleasure and happiness are on the rise then the ego is also affected. There is no positive control over the expression of ego, often resulting in a superiority complex: I am superior because I am happy, I am content, I am satisfied and I am the master of circumstances and situations.

In a subtle way, this kind of idea and attitude affects the ego identity. However, when there is positive control then pleasure becomes a tool for deepening one's spiritual experiences. This is the tantric and yogic view of pain and pleasure, suffering and enjoyment.

Suffering makes one aware of one's shortcomings and follies and creates a train of thought which impels questioning and analyzing, "What can I do to improve myself? What can I do to overcome this situation of suffering and pain?" These questions lead to the spiritual quest as one tries to discover, "Where have I gone wrong?" Suffering actually increases self-awareness. Practically everyone who has had spiritual experiences says that suffering increases awareness and improves behaviour and performance, thus acting as an aid to spiritual growth.

Suffering also needs positive control. If positive control is lacking, then you can fall into states of depression, anxiety, frustration and thoughts of suicide. These states are

not conducive to spiritual development. Therefore, try to maintain more positive control in your personality and you will notice that in times of suffering or happiness, you will cease to have the depressing or elevating experience, and you will be able to maintain your balance all the way through. Hence, it is not just suffering that is conducive to spiritual development, it is also positive control.

I have read that the subconscious mind responds better to a sankalpa worded in the present tense. Could you please comment on this?

I agree with that. A sankalpa always works better and more effectively when it is made in the present tense. You should not use the word 'wish' or 'desire' because that refers to the future, and the future for us is non-existent. Even the present is non-existent for us. Human beings live in the past, worry about the future and ignore the present. This is our mentality. Therefore, any sankalpa or creative, positive thought coming to our mind cannot change us. Even when we encounter a positive environment, it cannot change us because we always want to escape.

This happens in the ashram, too. There are people who want to run away from the ashram because they feel the ashram is not the right place for them. Why? They live in the insecurities of the past and worry about the future, totally ignoring the present. Definitely, during yoga nidra, if you can be in the present and frame your sankalpa in the present tense, it will have a deeper effect and meaning.

Is there any yogic explanation for dreams? Is it possible to control dreams through yoga? Is it true that dreams sometimes give notice of forthcoming events?

The yogic explanation of dreams is that they are caused by the subtle activity of the mind. This subtle activity is defined as the subconscious interaction of impressions within the mind in the form of memory, with the senses and other components of buddhi and ahamkara.

Yoga talks of three structures of mind: the gross, the subtle and the causal. A level of perception has been defined for each dimension of mind: *jagrat*, *swapna* and *nidra*. Cognition through the senses and gross mind is the *jagrat* state. The subtle form of cognition in the subtle dimension of mind is known as the *swapna* or dreaming state. The third state is *nidra*, when the mind is totally disconnected from the external world and senses.

In the Upanishads, *swapna* or the subconscious mind, is called *tejas* which means 'self-luminous' or 'self-illuminated'. If we look at the various definitions of mind in the *Yoga Sutras* and Upanishads, we will find that in the subtle dimension of mind, many different forms of unconscious interaction are taking place. Yet, even though they are unconscious in nature, they go through the various departments of *buddhi*, *ahamkara* and *manas*. When they pass through the various departments of *buddhi* and *ahamkara* they are experienced in the form of dreams. The cognition of the subtle mind is very powerful, more powerful than the gross mind. Therefore, the dreaming mind has been called self-luminous or *tejas*. That is the yogic explanation of dreams.

Dreams represent constant subconscious activity and if you are able to relax your subconscious personality, then your dreams will become less automatically. Whatever you see will have more meaning and a definite purpose, because in that state the mind becomes even more receptive, and is able to pick up the unknown energies from the environment and cosmos. An effort is made to relax the subconscious self in the practice of *yoga nidra*. In this and other such practices, we take our mind from an external, cognitive awareness to internalized cognition. Using the internalized cognition, which one attains in higher states of *yoga nidra*, it becomes possible to control dreams, to send dreams, to analyze and know the meaning of dreams.

When the mind becomes sensitive enough to receive frequencies of energy from the cosmos, the information received is of a different quality and calibre. We can then

interpret what we see as either futuristic dreams or some form of premonition. Of course, those dreams are rare because that fine-tuning has not yet taken place in the dials of the mind.

Can you speak to us about your life with Sri Swamiji?

No, I cannot talk about my experiences with Sri Swamiji because, frankly speaking, I do not have any. What is there to experience if you feel him within? You can only experience something if you feel it to be different from you. How can you feel something for somebody whom you consider to be part of yourself? Is it possible to experience that? No, that is not possible.

The only thing I can say about Sri Swamiji and his role in my life is that he is the inspiration that has guided me throughout. Through my physical eyes I can see his body, through my ears I can hear him speak, through my feelings I can feel his all-pervasiveness, but more than all of this, I feel him as my inspiration. That inspiration has taught me to rise with a smiling face whenever I have fallen, again and again. That is the only thing I can say about Sri Swamiji in relation to myself.

About the ashram training and the early days with him, we have seen him in many, many different roles. Many of you have seen him in the role of a guru, of a compassionate person, as an administrator or a yoga teacher. Many have known him as a sannyasin and many others as a good friend, but when I see that personality, I see it as an ocean with an infinite number of waves rolling upon it, each wave having a distinct personality, and yet not identifiable as an independent unit.

He tried to give us that training to us, too. He used to say, “Be like an ocean on whose body a thousand waves can roll, and yet the ocean never loses its serenity.” In relation to this, in 1986, when I was going to Australia, he said, “Satyananda is just a wave upon the cosmic ocean, and it is time that you people stop riding that wave.” That was the message he gave

to the Australians. He meant stop asking about that Swami Satyananda whom you saw as a yoga teacher, as a friend, guru, guide, karma yogi or sannyasin, and be part of the ocean. That was the training that we used to get, through all the different hardships.

We used to practise asana continuously, for eight hours every day. We had a four-hour class, then lunch, and immediately after lunch we practised headstand for half an hour without allowing the body to have any negative reaction. Many times we ate the same food again and again because it all used to fall back into the mouth. There was a period when we practised twelve hours of pranayama a day. We had all become like invisible blades of grass. We were given a small bucket and that bucket was our constant companion. All different kinds of food went into the same bucket – rice, dal, vegetables, sweets, and halva – everything mixed up together! Just enjoy it as it is experienced in the stomach!

We were trained using other external methods such as no sleeping for many, many days, and sometimes just rolling about with laughter. He used to have a subliminal way of teaching us. It was never direct – “You do this, you do that, you do this”, no. His way was very subtle, teaching without effort. In this way we all knew exactly what was wanted of us. There was never any questioning, “Shall I do this?” “What should I do next?” We all knew that we were changing, and we also knew that we were gaining and constantly receiving. There were times when he was so strict that just upon hearing the sound of his voice one would hide in the room, but, ultimately we found him to be an all-rounder.

Now, Sri Swamiji is a different person. Those people who knew him in the early days and who received training from him then, find it difficult to see him in the role that he is in today, because this role which he has moved into as a natural part of his evolution, as part of the cosmic ‘lila’, is the role of a seer – the seer of what is happening universally. He is not an intellectual now, although he still talks of things which would never have entered our minds for billions of years.

He is not a bhakti yogi like he was, but there is more depth to his bhakti. He is not the same karma yogi like he was, but no one can beat him at karma yoga. He has become a seer, a cosmic *drashta* or witness.

Personally speaking, I feel afraid of his level of drashta. I cannot speak for others who have seen him, but I am telling you my feeling. Sometimes I feel frightened, because there is no difference between the individual and the universal aspect of his being. He has the ability to see the entire life of an individual, the world, the universe, laid out before him, in clear black and white, although he hides it a lot and does not express it. Whenever there is a glimpse of this aspect of the siddha in him, it is both very uplifting and frightening. That is what he is now. He is a drashta and he is a siddha.

**What is the relationship between karma and free will?
When does karma end and free will begin?**

It is a very difficult subject. We do not know what karma is and I am not going to attempt to explain it, because I do not know the answer to it myself. We do not know what free will is because we are not aware of our relationship with the divine, with our inner nature. So, we should let the concept of free will remain speculative. These two things, karma and free will, add the spice to life.

We have heard and read about Advaita Vedanta, but it is very difficult to get a really clear concept of what this philosophy is about and how it is relevant in the life of a yogic aspirant. Could you please shed some light on this topic?

Advaita Vedanta is no different from our deepest inner feelings. It is more of a living experience than a philosophy or system.

Advaita means a single unit, not two. It means the experience of that single unit without qualification, without the notion of me and you. It is at once individual and a supreme something which is different from the individual.

This kind of feeling, experience and knowledge comes when we are in tune with our inner personality.

In the dissipated, distracted state of personality, experiences of duality are prevalent. When there is no dissipation and distraction, but only awareness, one-pointedness and harmony within oneself, the experience of one's individual nature and of the universe, of the manifest and the unmanifest dimensions, takes place as the various expressions of the one reality. These various expressions are Advaita Vedanta.

In the course of time, at the culmination of our spiritual growth, we come to the realization that "God and I are one and the same." It is not a theoretical or intellectual concept, but a living experience. The person who has that living experience becomes a siddha. It is also a part of the process of natural evolution for an individual to come to this stage. Advaita Vedanta is very much a part of one's spiritual life.

I always feel inclined to do more sadhana than the amount I have been given so I can progress a bit faster. Can you advise me?

We think that by practising twenty-four hours of sadhana a day we will attain realization faster, but doing twenty-four hours of sadhana is like eating continuously all day long. What will happen if you eat every minute, for twenty-four hours? You will just collapse. It is absolutely not possible! I want to make this aspect of sadhana very clear to you, no matter who you are.

Although our spiritual life is based on sadhana, there has to be a great degree of moderation, depending on the type of sadhana we are performing. When we are able to consider every moment of the day, every thought and observation, every action and reaction as part of that sadhana, then life itself becomes a process of enlightenment. When we are not able to do this, life becomes a process of experiencing more and more bondage, attachment, and ambition, which limits and restricts the expression of human creativity in all its forms.

Sadhana has to be considered in a different light, without any ambition attached to it. Your sadhana sankalpa, starting today, should be this, “I will not have any ambition in my sadhana.” Make the attainment of this concept a part of your effort in spiritual life.

You should not come to me and ask, “Can I practise this mantra?” And once I say yes, then just chant the mantra night and day, day and night, forgetting your other duties and commitments. That is escapism and will not give any result. It will only create indigestion in your psychic personality, and once it creates indigestion, your mind will go off. If you are hungry, then you eat to satisfy the hunger, you do not eat double, thinking that it will stop the hunger for twice as long. In the same manner, if ten minutes of sadhana are given, then only do ten minutes, not eleven, and not even ten minutes and point one of a second more. You have to be very clear about this. By pouring too much water on the seed that we have planted, we can destroy it.

Regarding your sadhana, I will simply advise three things. First, try to make every thought, action and reaction a positive, constructive and well thought out event. Be aware of yourself from that point of view. Whatever you do, both for yourself and for others, do only after you have considered its creativity, its positivity and its constructiveness.

Second, try not to be ambitious in your sadhana. Ambition is not only psychic. Why do we practise meditation? Because we want to gain something, to experience something. Why do we practise mantra? Because we have an expectation regarding it, and there is always the ambition to be, to become, to attain something. Try to remove that ambition. Many people find excuses to avoid this by saying, “Well, my ambition is my motivation.” Motivation that is based on ambition is not constructive, and the subtleties which are crucial for gaining a good understanding of, and a smooth interaction with the world, can be missed. Motivation has to be transformed into selfless effort. It should not become ambition. Try to be free from high expectation and ambition

regarding your sadhana. If you can do this, eventually there will no longer be any expectation or ambition attached to your external affairs, and you will lead a more harmonious, conflict and tension-free life.

Third, do not do more than the necessary amount required to complete your routine sadhana. Many people follow different kinds of programs consisting of asana, mantra, trataka and japa. Stick to that. Do not try to increase or reduce it. Maintain it for as long as you have been told to maintain it, because if you cannot maintain it and there is fluctuation, it will create an imbalance in your personality.

These are the three principles which we have seen in Sri Swamiji's sadhana style. He has been very clear in his approach and teaching, yet we have misunderstood a lot of what he has said. In his teaching there is a very clear concept of being watchful. Being watchful is something that happens through the mind. It is not an external action. We often become distracted while trying to maintain this awareness.

One should be watchful of both internal and external action at the time of asana, pranayama, meditation, japa, talking to another person, and even while eating or going to the toilet. That continuous awareness is very important, and it will not come if there is the desire to practise twelve hours of meditation, or to do mantra continuously. If you make an extreme effort, the result will oppose what you are expecting. That is why we often see people going funny when they earnestly take up a form of meditation or sadhana. They all turn peculiar.

Sri Swamiji once told me, "Look Niranjan, if I ask you to meditate for four hours you will be very happy to do so, because you will think I have given you a very big sadhana. If I ask you to practise one hour of asana and pranayama every day, you will also be very happy to do it. But if I ask you not to do anything, will you do it happily or not?" Then the understanding came to me, even if I do nothing but observe myself properly, this can also become part of my sadhana. This is the Zen of yoga.

I have received a name, symbol and mantra from you. How should I use this symbol and how often should I do my mantra? Should I practise the mantra loudly or silently?

According to the science of mantra, in any kind of meditation practice the awareness has to be fixed upon something in order to avoid states of mental dissipation. When we repeat our mantra with the mala, we close our eyes and start turning the beads. There comes a time when it is difficult to hold the attention on the mantra. It is a part of human folly that we cannot keep our attention fixed on any one point for an extended period of time. Many times we become drowsy and fall asleep, or find that our attention has wandered, that we are thinking of something else and the mantra is forgotten.

To prevent this, our other senses are also utilized to induce a greater sense of conscious awareness. Use of the symbol is one such means. You use your visual abilities to create an image or symbol in front of the closed eyes, and while repeating the mantra you focus on the symbol. Therefore, mantra awareness is divided into two parts: one in the form of thought, the other in the form of symbol. In case the thought form of the mantra is missed, the symbol form continues, and in case the symbol form is missed, the thought form continues. Therefore, whenever you use the mantra as a meditation practice you should definitely use the symbol as well.

In the yogic tradition three things are described: the psychic sound or mantra, the psychic symbol which we see in front of our closed eyes, and the psychic breath; meaning, the flow of consciousness, the expansion and relaxation of consciousness and not the physical breath. Just as we breathe in and out physically, there are times when our consciousness reaches a point of receptivity and again falls back to a state of dissipation. Again it moves to a point of one-pointed concentration, and then falls back. This fluctuation of consciousness is known as the psychic breath.

Initially, in order to train yourself to experience the power, force and benefits of the mantra, it is advised that you close your eyes and concentrate on the symbol, become

aware of the physical breath by observing it, and then with each inhalation and exhalation, repeat your mantra. For many people, especially those who are not used to the sound of the mantra, it is also advised to begin mantra practice by whispering the mantra. When you become comfortable with whispering the mantra and are aware of the sound, you can do it mentally. If you find that while repeating it mentally you become more and more introverted, start whispering again. If you find that even by whispering you cannot hold your attention, begin saying it out loud. That way you can maintain one flow of concentration.

Ultimately, you have to be the judge of what form of mantra you practise, whether mental, verbal or whispering, depending on your ability to handle states of concentration which lead to introversion and absence of awareness.

What can a karma sannyasin do in Australia to assist Sri Swamiji's mission? When should karma sannyasins wear geru, given that work and social requirements may oblige them to wear other types of clothing?

Karma sannyasins can help in Sri Swamiji's mission in Australia by keeping in touch with the Satyananda Ashram in Australia, because they are going to launch many projects in the future.

Regarding the second question, you have the very good examples of Superman and Batman. Does Clark Kent go to his office in the Daily Planet dressed as Superman? Or does Bruce Wayne meet police commissioner Gordon or attend social gatherings in the dress of Batman? Does a policeman wear his police uniform day and night? No!

In *Sannyasa Darshan*, published by Yoga Publications Trust, and in the Bihar School of Yoga *Code of Conduct for Karma Sannyasins*, it has been stated very clearly that when you are involved with yoga work and spiritual life, you should adopt that identity. When the need arises, go into the phone booth, change, and become Superkarma, and when the work is finished, go back, change, and come out as a normal person.

During darshan, Sri Swamiji spoke about the importance of sacrifice to God in the life of the devotee. Can you relate this to the relationship between guru and disciple? What is the sacrifice that is required by the disciple and the sacrifice that is most certainly made by the guru on the physical, mental, emotional, psychic and spiritual levels?

The only concept of sacrifice that I understand is *asakti tyaga*, the renunciation of attachment. In relation to bhakti, renunciation of *ahamkara*, the ego identity, is the highest form of renunciation so that ultimately, the force of divinity can be experienced in one's personality and life.

The basis of a good relationship between guru and disciple or between devotee and God is awareness, understanding and renunciation of the things that hold our attention and creativity at the very superficial, mundane level. Awareness must be there, because only through awareness can we recognize what we do and do not have. Understanding is necessary for developing a sense of discrimination, which will then lead us to the third level of renunciation - shedding the things that are unnecessary.

India is a good place to learn how to shed things. As you sit in the sun, you have to remove your layers piece by piece until you are practically sitting in your birthday suit. Modern society teaches you how to put things on, so that even in midsummer you wear sweaters in your air-conditioned cars, offices and homes. If you lead a spontaneous life, then many things tend to drop away naturally and spontaneously. Therefore, the basis of the guru-disciple relationship is awareness, understanding and renunciation, and if you follow this then the whole affair becomes a sequential process.

Take the example of Sri Swamiji. He has simply moved on from one stage of life to the next without any crisis. We, on the other hand, have gone through a crisis because we have not been able to understand the progression. We have formulated our own ideas, beliefs and concepts about what he is doing. For Sri Swamiji, the progression from one level to the next has been very smooth because he was always

aware of the command, the mandate he received from his guru, Swami Sivananda. He was aware of the inspiration that he received from the forces above. He understood his role in relation to what was happening in terms of yoga, working in India and abroad, and to his personal direction. He had awareness and understanding. Therefore, he was able to leave aside many unnecessary things. To us it looked like either a great renunciation or a great sacrifice, but to him it was just natural.

I do not think the word 'sacrifice' has any meaning, but if you must use it, it should mean shedding your attachments, ego, ambitions and desires, and living a more natural, spontaneous life in tune with the divine will.

How can we use the deep intuitive realizations or flashes of genius that we may have from time to time to bring about a change within us?

Generally, even after having a very strong flash of intuitive understanding or rational power, we experience a change in our personality for some time before falling back to our old habits and patterns.

The nature of the mind, personality and ego is more powerful than these flashes of understanding and genius. If a tree is big and shady, no other tree can grow fully in its shade. Even a blade of grass cannot grow in the shade. That is exactly how the gunas affect us; the gunas are the trees under whose shade we live, and it is in that shady area that we perform our actions.

Dependent on the gunas are the four states of consciousness – manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara. An intuitive flash can come from chitta, but even while a change is taking place in chitta, the other states of consciousness maintain their original nature. You can have an intellectual flash which may not necessarily be psychic or spiritual; you may have a spiritual realization which may not be practical. You may have a practical realization that goes against all your principles and accepted norms. Each flash is different and

independent. Each realization is confined to the area of the mind which is dominant at that time. Thus, we fall back once again to being the person we were before, until we make a concerted effort to change all four states at the same time.

In the progression of yoga, as you move from pratyahara to dharana to dhyana, the intuitive flash will be unified through every state of consciousness. When it is united in all states, the change is permanent.

What does kundalini awakening mean? Is there any bio-physiological change involved? Does any observable change occur in the personality after kundalini awakening?

Kundalini must first be understood. Kundalini is the final harmony experienced by those who have brought the ida and pingala poles of energy into a state of balance. If your *prana*, the solar force or pingala flow, and your *chitta*, the lunar force or ida flow, are in harmony with each other, kundalini will awaken. The awakening of kundalini comes about due to continued harmony between ida and pingala. This harmony influences the different levels or states of personality which are represented by the chakras – mooladhara, swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddhi, ajna and sahasrara. Apart from these, there are many other minor centres of awakening such as bhrumadhya, bindu, lalana and nasikagra.

The harmony between ida and pingala alters the different strata of human understanding and perception. As each level becomes more quiet and peaceful, the body and personality will definitely experience a change. If you are dealing with the fire strata at the level of manipura chakra, then physically you will experience either heat or a tremendous loss of body temperature; sometimes profuse sweating, sometimes shivering. If you are dealing with the anahata strata, represented by the element of air, you will have increased sensitivity. You will experience many feelings, such as the same feeling for one and all, and that you are radiating peace. At the same time, you might feel withdrawn, introverted, quiet and thoughtful. If you are dealing with the

ajna strata, you will become intuitive. These changes in both the body and personality are interlinked with each other.

Changes or experiences that occur physically are in the realm of matter; muscles, bones, nerves; in the realm of prana; heat, cold, lack of energy, hyperactivity, and in the realm of ajna; intuition, change the perceptions and behaviour. Of course, kundalini yoga is a very large and detailed subject, and you must first read about it to become familiar with the concept. Then you should start with certain practices that will prepare the body for the awakening of prana and kundalini, such as asana, pranayama, hatha yoga, raja yoga, etc. You should also try to acquire first-hand experience of the awakening under the direction of a capable person or master. In this way, gradually become your own scientist, experimenting with these two forces of ida and pingala and the final maha force of kundalini.

Could you please talk about initiation?

Initiation actually indicates a beginning, not a culmination or fulfilment. Whether it is mantra initiation, sannyasa initiation, tantric initiation or vedic initiation, it aims at providing a direction for one's life, a direction in which we can attempt to walk.

Mantra focuses the awareness and attention on the vibration of sound – anahad nada, which in turn helps to quieten the mind. Different forms of sannyasa initiation act as progressions from one stage to the next. Just as one evolves from Class One to Class Two to Class Three and beyond, in the same manner, after attaining as much perfection as is humanly possible in one stage, you move on to the next stage of sannyasa.

Poorna sannyasa is not the answer to our search, until and unless we think of poorna sannyasa as a change that totally alters our mode of living. What often happens is that when we desire something intensely, or when there is temporary renunciation and a feeling of detachment from the world, we are motivated to take sannyasa. If we have

been a failure in some aspect of life, we may be motivated to take sannyasa; if we feel like becoming part of the 'sannyasa club', or feel that taking sannyasa would help us fulfil some kind of ambition, then we may be motivated to take it. As long as we have any of these ideas in mind, sannyasa can never take us to the goal.

The meaning of sannyasa initiation should be very clear to everybody. There is a specific aim and direction behind it. A goal has to be pursued and attained. Therefore, I am often hesitant to give sannyasa, because although many people desire it, it is not even clear to them why they want it or what the real motivation behind taking it may be. Initiation should not be seen as the fulfilment of an ambition but the beginning of *purushartha*, a conscious, well-analyzed and controlled effort. A concrete, positive, constructive and creative effort is *purushartha*; it is not karma.

The word 'initiation' in Sanskrit is *diksha*, and it is derived from the Sanskrit root *dik* which means 'to see' or 'perceive'. It implies that we are expected to have a clear goal in life and not fluctuate from one end of the line to the other. It is a human tendency to seek quick results. If we are thirsty in the desert and want to drink water, what do we do? We dig one foot in one place and get tired and say, "I am sure there is no water here." We then go to another place and dig another twelve inches, become tired and again dig a third hole, then a fourth and a fifth. Ultimately, although we have dug fifty holes and much effort has been wasted, still there is no water. However, if we had dug fifty feet in only one place there is a big chance that we would have found water.

I am giving this example of digging either fifty holes, each one foot deep, or one hole fifty feet deep, to illustrate the two aspects of life. In normal life we dig fifty shallow holes, but in spiritual life, which begins after initiation or *diksha*, first there is a *sankalpa* or resolution that, "I will do *purushartha*!" This *purushartha*, or self-effort, should be based on a clear understanding of what we ultimately wish to gain from life. According to that, the action has to

be constructive, creative and positive, without any lack of perfection from our side.

The second sankalpa of initiation is to accept our limitations and try to work out ways of overcoming them. In this way, initiation evolves from a very basic sankalpa concerning purushartha, through the different stages where the mind is totally transformed from having selfish motivation to performing selfless action. This is the process of diksha.

Should one include yoga asana, chanting, mantra, and kirtan in one's daily sadhana? What exactly does sadhana entail?

Sadhana should not be lopsided. It is a continuous practice which affects each and every aspect of one's personality. Uniform, progressive and continuous practice is sadhana according to yoga. If you only practise asana you are not doing sadhana. If you practise only meditation, mantra or kirtan, it is not sadhana, it is only practise. One of the requirements of sadhana is that it should fulfil the requirements of the head, heart and hands at the same time, so that you experience completeness. This is not my quote; I am quoting from the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali.

If you are a keen aspirant, or sadhaka, you will have to seriously consider these aspects of yourself. If you are in the habit of practising asana, then include shatkarma and pranayama with them also. Include the practices of pratyahara and dharana. Practise mantra, kirtan and jnana yoga, self-study. Besides this, make an effort to change your lifestyle and behaviour. This integrated approach to awakening the human personality is known as sadhana.

What is the mind? Does it continue to exist after death?

Every wave that arises in the mind, in whatever form and by whatever it might be motivated, is a vritti. The entire concept of the mind in yoga is that it is a collection of vrittis, and nothing more than that. These vrittis are constantly changing, constantly evolving and growing. In order to

sublimate the mind it is important to direct or channel the flow of these vrittis. An effort has to be made to alter and modify the vrittis in order to develop the positive qualities of the mind.

Every wave loses its intensity and power after some time and becomes part of the body of the ocean. Again, when a powerful current sweeps the surface of the ocean, another wave is generated. After travelling some distance, this other wave also loses its power and gradually becomes one with the body of the ocean. This is a continuous process that does not stop even with death.

This process is not linked with dying. It is linked with evolution, and evolution does not stop with one's physical death. It is a continuous process, and what we consider to be death becomes another form of life in a different dimension. After all, many people claim to have visions of spirits or images of those who have departed, or manifestations of a departed saint or master in a physical body. These experiences are nothing but a glimpse into the subtle plane of existence where matter does not exist.

Death is a form of life; do not consider death as being anti-life. Death is a form of subtle life in which matter simply dissolves because there is no need for it. The other tattwas or elements continue to function in their subtle way. It is due to the functioning of these other tattwas that we often become aware of the spirit dimension, and the recognition of spirits is also a form of life, a part of the evolution of humanity. Therefore, yoga does not believe in the concept of total death or the total absence of every kind of movement. What we call death is simply physical change, the life force going out and away from the body that is made up of gross manifest matter or elements.

Once, in 1981, somebody took me to a place where there were many dead bodies. It was in the United States, in the morgue of a medical hospital where dead bodies are kept for post-mortems. It was an incredible sight, to see so many dead bodies lying in a row, all looking clean and white. While

looking at those bodies, the doctor showed me how the body works. He would put a hand inside the stomach and pull something, and the big toe would move, pull something else and the arm would move. I think every medical student does it. What actually moves the body is something else.

I was fascinated by the things a dead body could do. I thought to myself, “Okay, this is the body. What makes it move? What gives it life? How does that dead, cold lump of body experience warmth, emotion, energy, decay and growth? By what force does it think and desire?” For three nights I could not sleep. This thought was uppermost in my mind. What is it? Is it only prana or is it a different type of consciousness? To this day, I have not found the answer.

However, one thing is clear: the body and mind are only expressions of consciousness. The vrittis are an expression of consciousness. When these vrittis become still, when they are pacified and there is no movement that can be recognized as being a particular vritti, thought, feeling, or emotion, this absence of emotion is not death. If we consider death to be only of the material world and dimension, then there is definitely life which is non-material. If we consider death to be total, material and non-material both, then there is no existence. So, first answer the question, “Do I exist or not?” and you will have the answer you asked for.

What is sannyasa, what is the beginning and end of sannyasa, and who is fit for the life of a sannyasin?

If you want to know what sannyasa is according to tradition, I can tell you, but if you want to know my feeling about sannyasa, I cannot tell you because it is an ongoing process of unfoldment and evolution.

There is a saying of Sri Swamiji’s which defines the spirit and process of sannyasa, “Life is a flowering mystery, and every unfoldment is beautiful.” The spirit of sannyasa has been captured in this statement. For those who understand life as a “flowering mystery”, the unfolding of each and every petal, of each and every stage of life, is beautiful. They only

see the beauty in it. They do not see the conflict. They see the harmony.

Generally, we are more aware of the pain and conflicts existing in our personality and less aware of the harmony. Therefore, it is important that we first change our view about life. This process of changing our view is the process of sannyasa.

Sannyasa is not just shaving the head or wearing geru, living in the ashram, and walking about starry-eyed all the time. That is known as *pakhanda* or artificial sannyasa. It is necessary that we maintain an awareness which encompasses the entire level of existence. The moment we are able to have a universal vision, the concept and fire of sannyasa will manifest in our life. It is from this angle that we have to understand the sannyasa system.

I have written a lot on this subject in the book *Sannyasa Darshan*, which is based on what I have been able to pick up from traditional literature, and also on my personal experience with Sri Swamiji. In this book there are many different ideas about poorna sannyasa, karma sannyasa, jignasu sannyasa, rishi sannyasa, whether or not sannyasins have to follow a structured discipline, and all the different questions that arise in the mind. In brief, I can tell you that sannyasa is a process of growing up, of becoming mature.

One day an aged person came to me and broke down totally saying, "Swamiji, I have been a failure all my life. Whatever I have gained I have lost. I feel I have not attained anything." So, I tried to console him, but he continued to say the same thing over and over again. Finally, I gave up. I said, "Sorry, I cannot help you. It is better that you find your own answers." The man came out from the room and on the lawn were three little children playing with a doll. One of the arms of the doll broke, and the little girl started to cry. I came out to the veranda of the kutir, and what did I see? The man who had been crying inside was consoling the little girl by saying, "Don't cry. You have not lost anything. A toy is just a toy. You can buy a new one. Do not shed tears for a clay

doll.” I called him and said, “Apply to yourself what you have just said to the little girl.” Because he had come shedding tears and saying, “I have not attained anything, I have lost everything”, just like that little girl, only instead of playing with a clay toy, he had been playing with bigger and better, self-animated toys. His loss was actually the same as the loss of a toy doll to a little child.

If you cannot go beyond conflict and suffering, do not talk about trying to attain something over which you have no control, and for which you cannot train yourself. Sannyasa is not just the following of an idea but also a training, self-training. We find many overnight prophets looking for easy gain, and claiming to be sannyasins or gurus of the highest order. We are not here to question who is right or who is wrong. Everyone is free to do as per their ambitions and desires, but do not mix ambitions and desires with the training and lifestyle of sannyasa. If you can keep those two separate then your sannyasa is real. If you cannot keep them separate then your sannyasa is just for show. We are not here to join the club of spiritual elites.

The change in human consciousness can only take place if we are able to differentiate between the aim and training of sannyasa, and our common day-to-day ambitions for name, fame and wealth. Therefore, it becomes very difficult for many to adapt and adjust to the training of sannyasa.

When I first came to the ashram Sri Swamiji held a sannyasa training course which lasted for three years. It was a tough course. We were one hundred and eight people then, and out of those only three people remain in the ashram today. After that course there was no sannyasa training due to the clash of ambitions and direction in people’s lives. Meditation and sadhana is not the training of sannyasa.

After a gap of practically twenty years, we conducted a one-year, intensive sannyasa course for Indian nationals. There were fifty-four in that group, exactly half of what Sri Swamiji had. Then we held a six-month sannyasa training course for aspirants from overseas and many of them are

present today. You can ask the participants of that course themselves about what training they received, whether regarding yoga, administration, disciplined living, or spirituality. Was that different from the normal style of ashram living, to which we are generally exposed? I am sure they will say, yes. The environment was different, the drive was different, the motivation was different, and the interaction was different. That was a special type of training.

Many were initiated by Sri Swamiji with the hope that they would take up sannyasa life in earnest over a period of many years, but out of those how many have actually stayed here to continue their training? Only a handful. You take sannyasa, stay here one month, and then you are off! You open your ashram, organize seminars, follow your ambitions, and claim you are a sannyasin, an initiate of the Bihar School of Yoga, or a disciple of Sri Swami Satyananda, but you do not even know the guy! You do not even know his aspirations. You do not even know what he wants in life. You have been attracted for some reason, whatever it may be. Whether his books are the reason, or his personality and charisma, knowledge and capabilities as a guide and guru, I do not know, and I do not want to know. I only know that sannyasa is a training and a commitment to one's guru and to oneself, and they both go hand in hand.

You must consider why you want to take sannyasa. Is it just to be different? Or just to have the satisfaction that from today you have become spiritual, which gives you the right to behave in a careless manner wherever you go? If you think that sannyasa gives you the right to behave carelessly in society, and to fulfil your wants in the name of the guru, then you have to rethink your position.

With regard to who can take sannyasa, anybody can take it. There is no restriction. Everyone is free to adopt the sannyasa lifestyle but there has to be the will to do so, and the drive. Those who have the will and the drive ultimately reach their destination. Those who do not have the will

and the drive fall back once again into *maya*, illusion. If you are a sannyasin, whether you are in the jignasu, karma, poorna or rishi category, please let me clarify that each one in itself is a sadhana and none is superior to the other. Specific guidelines have been given for the sadhanas and the interactions of the jignasu, karma, and poorna sannyasins, the so-called poorna sannyasins. These are the guidelines for our further education, growth and attainment.

Many times people fight with me because they do not want a particular type of sannyasa. I say, "Well, if you do not believe in my judgement of you, then why ask me for sannyasa? This means you are not ready to accept sannyasa as sadhana. You want sannyasa as a diploma. Each form of sannyasa is a sadhana in itself, and it is in the spirit of sadhana which you have to work in this life, and not with any kind of motivation or ambition.

The main thrust of your sadhana should not be to attain realization. That is a very far off concept. In fact, in my opinion, realization is just an outcome, a symptom of having a strong will, conviction about one's path, of having faith in the guru and in oneself. These are the important qualities that one should have on the spiritual path. If there is no drive and no will, you cannot budge an inch. You will just be static, like an elephant at rest. Furthermore, if you do not have faith in yourself, in your guru and sadhana, then again it will be difficult to find mental harmony and equilibrium, because the absence of faith will create disharmony. Therefore, faith is an important quality.

One should have the conviction: "I know the path that I have chosen will lead me to the end!" That conviction has to be there, because if you choose a type of sannyasa just because something feels right to you at a particular time and in a particular space, you are only seeking satisfaction. But if you are given a path as your very own then there should be full conviction that 'this is definitely it!' On this path you must walk right on to the end. When you have faith and conviction, the quality of surrender will evolve automatically.

From faith, conviction and surrender emerges jnana, and jnana will one day convert itself into realization.

Please talk to us about death in the Hindu or Indian tradition.

I think you should concern yourself with life. You cannot live life properly and you are thinking about death.

When is the spirit seen to be leaving the body?

It is never seen.

What is the best way to encourage one's partner to practise yoga?

Please do not mind me saying so, but I do not know the answers to such questions. I am not a marriage counsellor, nor am I a data bank for finding partners. I am just a yoga teacher. If you want to know what asanas to do, then you can ask me, but how should I know what your partner's hang-ups are?

If you consider somebody to be your partner, you should have the guts to open yourself to them. What is the use of latching on to somebody who does not agree with you? This is common sense advice from me, not as a yoga teacher, but as a person. As a sannyasin I would say, 'Go and fight your own karma!'

If, in a relationship, you cannot sort out your problems and difficulties in a positive way, without losing your awareness, direction and clarity of mind and without having a one-track mind concerning your attractions, then I would not recommend such a relationship. You must be able to make clear decisions. If there are difficulties and differences you have to sort them out, not me. I can only pat you on the back and tell you to do pawanmuktasana part one for six months, but about marriage or even relationships, I cannot say anything.

Can we use art as a form of meditation?

I knew a painter who, before painting, would sit in meditation and whatever used to come to his chidakasha he

would recreate on canvas. He did not use external concepts and ideas to create his abstracts. He actually brought out the visions that he saw in meditation and put them on canvas. His paintings had a very distinctive nature and quality about them. He died about four or five years ago, and I was quite keen on having his paintings brought to Munger to keep, but it did not materialize.

I like that type of artistic expression where you give shape and colour to something which comes from within. I cannot describe those paintings to you, but they are very powerful; just looking at the canvas one could go into a meditative state. That was the process of painting: meditate, see the image, the play of colours, lights and flashes in chidakasha and then paint it. The entire painting process then becomes a state of dharana. Thus, if you have an inclination to try this, you will see the result in the course of time.

Why are sannyasins asked to avoid, among other things: climbing trees for fruits, travelling at night between dusk and dawn, swimming across a river, travelling in a carriage, fasting often, consuming ghee, living in pairs or groups and staying in one village for more than two nights? Further, the *Bhikshuk Upanishad* says that paramahamsas subsist on urine and the dung of cows and observe *chandrayanuvrat*, taking one to fifteen mouthfuls of food daily according to the lunar cycle. What does subsisting on urine and cow dung imply?

I have explained many times what sannyasa is and especially what it means to us, but in sannyasa there are also many different traditions. In the Dashnami parampara to which we belong, the Saraswati order, the bhikshuk tradition is different from the tantric tradition of sannyasa. Practically every tradition and culture developed a philosophy of sannyasa which was unique in its own way.

Even today there are sects within Christianity: Benedictine, Franciscan and so on. They all have their own rules concerning what one should pursue, what one should avoid,

how one should behave and so forth. In the same way, the various traditions following the basic aim of sannyasa developed their own lifestyles, disciplines, austerities and ways to overcome the barriers of the mind in order to experience our ultimate nature.

The *Bhikshuk Upanishad* has different references on sannyasa than what we would find in the Vedanta, Vaishnaiva or Shaiva systems. Therefore, it becomes very difficult to generalize and say something is referring to sannyasa when actually it is not referring to sannyasa at all. We tend to confuse the sannyasa lifestyle with a preconceived idea of spirituality, religion or philosophy. I am telling you this very frankly, although I may have said something different in the past because we were discussing a specific aspect of sannyasa at that time.

The concepts which are highlighted in sannyasa are viveka and vairagya, jnana and karma; hardness of mind and softness of heart. These are the main principles of sannyasa, not eating cow dung or drinking urine or anything like that. These are a set of disciplines imposed by the thinkers of a particular era. We also have to consider that the mentality of people one thousand five hundred years ago was different than it is today. Their aspirations, their way of thinking, their interaction with the world, society and nature was also different. Therefore, the rules which applied then do not necessarily apply at this junction of the twentieth and twenty first centuries.

The main theme of sannyasa is a six-pronged approach to life. First, have *viveka*, discrimination. Try to attain a state of consciousness where discrimination is at its height. Discrimination arises from cultivating a broader vision of life and due respect for life itself, because if due respect is not given, the entire concept of sannyasa is finished. Discrimination between selfless and selfish motivations and just and unjust interactions in society are all part of viveka.

The second aspect of sannyasa is *vairagya*: be a passive witness, an actor on the stage, without identifying totally

with the role. When this awareness develops, then sensual and sensorial objects of pain and pleasure do not have any influence on you and thus do not alter your state of mind. The aspect of non-attachment is then experienced.

The third aspect of *sannyasa* is *jnana*: knowledge, awareness and effort. *Jnana* is having the desire to attain an awakening of the faculties of *buddhi* to such an extent that it becomes an experience. Awakening the horizons of *buddhi* is the purpose of *jnana* and the implementation of that wisdom in the world is *karma*, performance, the fourth aspect.

The fifth aspect is hard-headedness. Hard-headedness does not mean arrogance, it means not being influenced by the environment, by speech and thoughts for example, that tend to disturb one's mental peace. If one person says that another person is bad, we begin to think that he is bad. When someone else says that person is good, again we take it at face value. We do not know what that person really is like. They may be very nice and yet we think they are very bad or good because we are influenced by another person's opinion. We are subject to the mood swings, having no clarity of mind. Having a clear mind, free from influences circumstantial or otherwise, is hard-headedness.

Having a good feeling for everyone is soft heartedness, the sixth prerequisite for a *sannyasin*. That feeling of loving, of caring, of nurturing, should be universal. If there are two people who have had an accident and are lying in the hospital bed, fighting with death, and one happens to be your son while the other is totally unknown to you, whom will you feel for more? Will you feel the same way for the other kid as you feel for your son? No, there is bound to be a major difference. You may shed tears; you may take good care of the other kid also, but deep inside there is a feeling of 'mineness' concerning your son. Bridging that remaining difference and extending the feeling to everyone is the soft heart of *sannyasa*.

There should be a universal interaction with the cosmos taking place continuously in the life of a *sannyasin*. This is

the basic aim which every philosophy and school of thought has tried to impart. The best lifestyle conducive to the attainment of these six aspects is sannyasa. In each style of life there is a different aim, direction and dimension. It is only possible to have those six items in life when you try to detach yourself from society, the ideas of 'mine' and 'thine' and begin to develop a universal or broader vision of life.

Those people who think that by taking sannyasa one comes one step closer to self-realization are mistaken. Self-realization cannot be attained by following just one discipline, whether viveka or jnana, a proficiency in karma or in vairagya, whether it is having a hard head and a messy heart, or a soft heart and a messy mind. It is not possible to follow one path and attain self-realization. There has to be an integration of the six aspects I have mentioned. They are all sadhanas and you have to pass in every one.

You choose a career quite early, after high school, whether as a musician, a sound engineer, a doctor or a lawyer. Then you take up a subject and study it, moving from the beginner's to the advanced class. To obtain a Bachelor of Science degree you have to go through many examinations. Therefore, when you take sannyasa, do not think you do not have to take examinations. A person who thinks that is really foolish!

In sannyasa you have to take examinations in hatha yoga, in raja yoga, in the yamas and niyama, etc. What niyama have you perfected in your life? Are you truthful? No, I know you are not truthful with me, but think for a moment, are you even truthful with yourself? No. Do you follow the principle of ahimsa? No. Do you follow non-possessiveness or aparigraha? No. Despite having been a sannyasin for so many long years, you have not passed a single exam. You have been failing every year. Unfortunately, we are all in the same class.

Meditation will not take you anywhere. You have been meditating for so long, why have you not had any experience? You see, we have always taken sannyasa as a means to leading a carefree life, but the reality is quite the contrary. Many fail, even people with the high post of guru

tend to miss out certain points, and that is the reality. We tend to become very carefree and think we are exempt from the disciplines and norms when actually we are not. We are in a state of extreme blindness towards our duties. We tend to become more ignorant and not wise at all.

I am telling you this because I do not want you to think that sannyasa is drinking cow's milk and eating cow's shit. No! The concept of sannyasa is totally different from the norms set by the tradition in the past. There are some people who may even start doing all that because it is mentioned in the Upanishads or in tantra, but this is not how you should perceive sannyasa.

What happens to the spirit after death?

There is gradual detachment from the body. It is not a sudden cut off, but a slow detachment, because the spirit is not only conscious, it is also unconscious. What happens when we go to sleep at night, are we aware of ourselves then? No. In the state of unconsciousness, an eight-hour sleep will not be experienced in the form of time. The period will condense into one moment.

The gradual disassociation of the spirit is like getting up from the ground and ascending to heaven and gradually losing sight of earth. As long as you can see the earth there is recognition of the nature, quality and symbol that the earth represented to us. When it becomes a distant speck there is unconscious ascendance, and after the unconscious ascendance, there is a merger with light.

Unconscious ascendance is *nirvana* or *moksha*, freedom from the senses, from pain and pleasure, joy and suffering, hot and cold, positive and negative. Yoga says that beyond that, since unconsciousness is also a state, there has to be another state where the conscious and the unconscious are both witnessed by a third person, the *drashta* or seer.

These are the different gradations of the soul leaving its attachments to the dimension of name, form and idea; time, space and object.

What is the most important thing in life?

The most important thing in life is understanding. In the absence of understanding, everything we attempt fails, whether in relation to oneself or others. Therefore, from a practical point of view, having the ability to understand oneself and others is a very important quality to develop.

From the spiritual point of view, the most important thing in life is knowing how to handle the ego. If you can manage these two things, developing understanding and handling the ego, I am sure you will become a good human being.

When is the best time to practise meditation?

You can practise meditation best at night. I suggest meditation at night because in this modern society, people are running against time and very few people find a space of, say, one hour, which they can devote to their yoga practice. Therefore, I advise you to perform dynamic physical practices in the morning and passive meditation techniques at night. In the morning your body is in need of pranic energy, and if you practise the physical techniques you will have strength, stamina and lightness of body.

After coming back from your encounter with the world, at night, when you are mentally tired, fatigued, exhausted and want relaxation, the mind is cluttered with thoughts and there is no focus. If you meditate you will be in a better position to deal with the mental experiences.

In an ashram environment where we turn off the lights at nine o'clock, meditation is most effective in the morning, but in the normal social environment where we do not go to bed until eleven or twelve, it is better to divide the practices into two parts: physical in the morning, mental at night.

Have you any proof that the amrit which originates in bindu and is dispersed in manipura, exists, or is this something we must simply believe?

It has been experienced by yogis that there are many, many different chakras in our body, and each chakra has a specific

function which may be related to the endocrinal gland systems. The concepts of the yogis were not only limited to the physical body. They experienced kundalini, which is not a physical phenomenon. If you cut open your body and try to find a little snake in your mooladhara, you will find nothing! You want to believe in the kundalini and the chakras, but you do not want to believe in the amrit which drops from bindu.

I do not think that any scientific equipment or know-how is capable of analyzing and observing the processes happening deep in our body. Today we do not even know how many kinds of hormones are produced by the different glands. Many of our ideas are mere speculations. We do not know what the different types of hormones produced by the pineal and pituitary glands are, and we are still searching for some kind of solid proof. Science has definitely not yet come to the point where it can observe and analyze a non-physical event and experience.

However, there is something more powerful than physical science, and that is the intuitive science which yogis evolved in the past. They were scientists of the first calibre, the best you could find in the world. In fact, if you study ancient Indian history you will find that yogis, sadhus and sannyasins were the discoverers of many sciences which are only now being re-discovered.

A complete book on the atomic theory was written by Maharshi Kanaad about seven thousand years ago. If you compare his theories with scientists of this age you will find that there is absolutely no difference, rather, his descriptions include many more things which modern science is still looking into.

There is another faculty in human beings which has the ability to observe and analyze things which are not material, but which are nevertheless a part of the overall reality. The overall reality which governs the entire process in the created universe is more accurate than any kind of scientific description. I will definitely believe a yogi when I hear him

say that these things happen because I have faith, not in his intellectual power, but in his greater intuitive power.

We have to look at the ancient traditional concepts from a non-material view point, and at this level, science takes on a different meaning. When science is able to realize, discover and experiment with the non-material, all scientists will become yogis. Then there will not be any need of instrumentation. There is no instrument in the world that can say whether the soul or spirit exists, that can show you the graph of either the soul or the spirit, or even the mind for that matter. So there are some things which we have to accept. We have to try to discover the truth behind these concepts with the power of our own intuition.

Do major surgical procedures interfere with the pranic and psychic pathways in the body?

No. You can cut off my physical arm but not my pranic arm. This is illustrated by Kirlian photography. If you cut a leaf in half and take a picture you will get the full image of the complete leaf. Even in the case of people who have had accidents in factories where their fingers have been cut off by some machine, the pranic image of the full hand with fingers can be seen. Of course, Kirlian photography is not the final statement because the energy which is seen is only the electro-magnetic field of the object, which diminishes in the course of time.

Prana is not an electro-magnetic field and our pranic body is not composed of some form of energy that can diminish with the decay of the physical body. If we go one step beyond Kirlian photography we may be able to discover our pranic body. Clairvoyants can see the pranic body and yogis have experienced the continuity of the pranic body even after the death of the physical body. Therefore, surgery in any part of the body definitely does not affect our pranic body. It may disrupt the pranic flow moving through our physical body, but not in the pranic body.

There are different levels of energy flow and I will not go into the theory of it, but the pranic flow is not in the form of veins and arteries. No. It is in the form of a flow field. It is a complete field in itself. So, if I chop off my finger I am only chopping off one flow which moves through my finger, I have not chopped off the whole field. Although prana is in the body, it is not the body, it is different.

Are the effects of karma, whether good or bad, felt by the mind, body or spirit?

The karmas, whether good or bad, are felt by the body, mind and spirit. Of course, the intensity of the karmas is experienced more in the manifest, finite dimension of body and mind. Its intensity is negligible with respect to the infinity of spirit, but since spirit, mind and body form one unit, the awareness of karma takes place in all three dimensions, not only physically and mentally.

Do we have to suffer the results of our karmas in this birth or in the next birth?

The theory is quite simple. If you plant a seed in the ground, you are not going to see the flower, fruit or even sapling the same day; it takes time. It takes about seven to ten years for a mango tree to become fully mature, even longer in many cases. The seed that we plant today will only bear fruit sometime in the future.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, two major types of karma have been defined. There are many other types of karma, but these two are the most important. One is *prarabdha* karma, that karma which has come with you from your previous lives and which has become part of your destiny. The other is *sanchita* karma, which you accumulate in your present life. There are many karmas that one can experience in one life and many which are carried forward to the next life. Of course, in order to know the state of one's karmas, one has to become a yogi or a siddha.

After so many years of devoting myself to my guru and to whatever I have been asked to do as a sannyasin living an ashram life, I now see that the ideals of sannyasa you put before us are so far beyond me that I feel I should stop fantasizing with the idea of poorna sannyasa and ask for re-initiation as a householder aspirant with your blessing. What is the difference between surrender of a karma sannyasin and that of a poorna sannyasin?

When the mind is unclear or when there is some form of conflict concerning the ideals and aspirations of the lifestyle that you are leading, then thoughts come of either leaving it or adopting something else. Your question actually shows that there have been conflicts created within your mind because you set high goals for yourself. These goals may sound philosophically very pious, pure and important, but you do not have the practical strength to follow them through.

You know the story of Milarepa. Milarepa goes to his guru in search of knowledge in the form of some esoteric doctrine. That is his aspiration, but his guru, Marpa, does not give him any knowledge or initiation; rather, he makes him work like a donkey and treats him worse than a dog. Put yourself in the shoes of Milarepa. You come here to the ashram, or you take sannyasa and try to surrender, or you try to imbibe something which is not initially a part of you. Your motivation becomes strong and powerful. Then you are exposed to different circumstances; conditions or situations which make your aspirations seem unobtainable. Thus, conflict comes into your mind.

Milarepa could easily have thought, "I've been slogging myself to death. My guru has been very rude to me. He has not even called me once. He has not taught me one single sutra, rather he is psychotic. He tells me to construct a house and when I have finished it he tells me to tear it down again. Then he asks me to build another house and when I complete that, again he asks me to tear it down, stone by stone. Have I come here to be an architect or to attain self-

knowledge?” Milarepa could easily have thought that, but no, he said to himself, “Right or wrong, I have taken Marpa as my teacher.” He was able to control the conflicts that would easily have arisen in the mind of any other human being. He was able to let go of all the things he was holding on to, and ultimately, he became greater and wiser than his own guru.

Many times when people come here for sannyasa, they think, “When I take sannyasa I will meditate for ten hours a day and in the course of time, I will have fantastic visions and experiences and become fully or semi-realized.” However, that is a very self-centred and selfish attitude. If you think meditation is more important than your other *kartavya*, duties, and dharma, then you are not going to gain anything, because you are blocking out the expression of your other personality traits.

Of course, sadhana helps, but more important than sadhana is your attitude towards your lifestyle. When there is acceptance of one’s lifestyle, surrender takes place automatically. Surrender will never take place if there is non-acceptance of the present circumstances and situations.

You have to learn to accept, to ‘be here now’ and neither have fantasies of the future nor live in the past. Ninety-nine percent of the time you have fantasies of the future or you live in the past and ignore the present. To consider that the present is unnecessary or unfulfilling is one of the greatest mistakes you can make. The concept of ‘being here now’ is acceptance of life in its totality. When acceptance is full, surrender comes automatically; you do not have to try to attain it. You do not have to practise meditation to increase the feeling of surrender, or look at your guru ‘starry-eyed’. Acceptance of your lifestyle leads to the awakening of the inherent dormant faculties of surrender, harmony, integrity, understanding and compassion, all the qualities we aspire for in spiritual life.

We talk so much of compassion. If there is no acceptance, how can there be compassion? We talk of integrity. If there is no acceptance, how can there be integrity? There is bound

to be disharmony when acceptance is not there. Surrender is the outcome of leading a life in which you accept your present situation. When the present is accepted, then one has a vision, an aim, a direction, and a goal to strive for.

Therefore, I would suggest that you learn to accept yourself. Do not set yourself goals which are based on fantasy and have no practicality. Definitely, you can have a goal based on fantasy after you know yourself. Then maybe there will be a possibility that you can go a hundred steps in that direction. You will find a way to do it after there is conviction, strength and willpower, but in every stage of life you have to find a balance.

Our effort must be directed towards living in the present and improving the present, not living in the past and trying to improve the future. The natural outcome of this process is the dropping of barriers. Then surrender comes and the feeling of unity arises. Duality, the manifestation of ego, of one's negative nature, is brushed aside. Therefore, try to live in the present.

For the benefit of the neophyte, can you tell us something about the mission and tradition of sannyasa?

The main thrust of sannyasa should be to follow one's dharma. That is the mission of the individual, and that is our tradition, but the concept of dharma has to be properly understood.

Dharma literally means 'something which you imbibe'. We all imbibe continuously throughout life. After imbibing, whether it is in education, a particular lifestyle, or a vision for one's life, the practical application is known as dharma. If you are able to apply education properly, creatively, and constructively, then it becomes part of the human dharma. If you are able to give what you have received, positively and constructively, it becomes part of dharma.

Dharma is the defined nature of everything in the universe. Whether animate or inanimate, everything has to follow its own law. Living in accordance with the laws of nature and the divine is considered to be following one's

dharma. In fact, it is the manifestation of our inherent nature which we should recognize to be dharma. Fulfilling that dharma should be our mission, and that is our tradition.

Regarding human beings and their dharma, dharma often tends to take on the colour of their mental whims and fantasies according to their understanding of nature, samskaras and behaviour. However, it is the qualities coming from the depths of your being, uninfluenced by the idea of personal gain, which should be considered as the guidelines in accepting, understanding and realizing one's mission.

Everyone in the world is whimsical. We are all motivated by our whims and not by wisdom. Sometimes, along with the whims, our ambitions and desires become predominant. However, when we move with wisdom we become very aware of our actions and interactions. It is to this, our actions and interactions, that we must give special consideration. Action is something which we perform, and interaction is where others are exposed to our actions. In following our dharma, these two are important. We should always be aware of what we are doing and understand why we are doing it.

This understanding need not necessarily be based on intellectualization and should not involve head-trips, but should be based on a deep feeling of what is right, correct and just. In other words, there should not be any doubt or conflict. If there is a conflict it means you are a slave to your whims. If there is no conflict then your ideas and aspirations are clear. Once the ideas or aspirations are clear, the interactions with the environment and other people are transformed into something positive and constructive.

Therefore, following one's dharma and managing one's actions and interactions correctly is the mission and tradition of sannyasa.

How can I succeed in having regularity in sadhana?

Regularity in sadhana comes through effort, and sadhana only becomes fruitful when regularity is maintained, *Tatra sthitou yatnobrahasah*, is the statement of the *Yoga Sutras*. Regularity

can only be maintained if there is faith, conviction and determination, and if you are ready to follow the sadhana for an extended period of time without getting bored.

Just as you consider food, water, breathing and wearing clothes to be needs of the body, and happiness to be a requirement for having satisfaction, contentment and joy in life, sadhana is necessary for attaining something beyond one's normal ability. You have to develop willpower and conviction. You need to do *purushartha*, action, full of effort, aimed at positive attainment in life.

A professor we met here said that genius could be created by yogic practice. Please elaborate.

Well, I do not think it is very difficult to create a genius through the practices of yoga. What is the meaning of the word 'genius'? A genius is someone who is bright, someone sharp; someone able to analyze a situation instantly, take a decision and act upon it; one whose mental faculties are awake and not dormant. Science says that, at present, only ten percent of our brain is active and the other ninety percent is dormant. Modern psychology says that only thirty-three percent of the mind is active. It has been seen that through the practice of yoga, and especially if you are sincere in your effort, in the course of time you can awaken the other dormant areas of the brain and mind. When these dormant areas awaken, the receptive, expressive power of the mind becomes very sharp.

You must have heard the stories about the photographic memory of Swami Vivekananda. You must also have heard that after Einstein's death, scientists conducted research on his brain to see which centres were active in him that are not usually active in normal human beings. There are quite a few examples of people who have awakened creative areas of the brain and mind either naturally or through effort. This awakening of the brain and mind is the seed of genius. Through the practices of yoga, especially pranayama and concentration, it is possible to improve your mind and brain. Then people will call you a genius.

What can we achieve through yoga? What is the purpose of human life?

What can we achieve through yoga? In one word: optimism. In another word: creativity. And what is the purpose of human life? In one word: creativity! Both are the same.

The purpose of yoga and the purpose of human life are the same: to excel in whatever field you are in, whether it be as a student, worker, businessman or sannyasin, and to explore the creative aspect of that. The purpose is to find contentment in life, and through contentment, total perfection.

Why is liberation necessary?

It is not necessary for those who do not want it. No one is forcing you to be liberated. I can identify with that question because I do not desire moksha in my life; it is not one of my aspirations.

In order to have a complete, integrated, and harmonious life, which is conducive to one's growth in this earthly dimension, the seers of the past gave society the four principles of life. They gave them the principles of *artha*, security; *kama*, fulfilment of desires; *dharma*, awareness of one's duties, obligations and commitments; and *moksha*, perfection. These four principles aim to integrate the external manifest needs with the internal, unmanifest experiences of the people.

We have not yet been able to incorporate these four aspects into one. Artha or security, whether financial, social, personal and familial, represents the external pursuit of happiness, and that is our understanding of the term. Kama, the fulfilment of one's desires, we consider to be non-spiritual, and that is our mistake.

There are two sides to everything: *tamasic*, or negative, and *sattwic*, or positive. If artha manifests in its negative form, one becomes caught in the conflict of 'ninety-nine and one hundred': I have ninety-nine, but if I can get one more I can have one hundred. There is a craving for more and more all the time. We crave for more security, and because of this craving we experience insecurity. In its positive aspect,

artha is contentment, contentment with whatever we have and feeling secure with that. There is no urge, no search for more; the craving aspect has been overcome.

Kama, the fulfilment of desires, in its negative aspect is self-centred possessiveness, while in its positive aspect it is a tool for becoming free from the bondage of attraction and repulsion, like and dislike. In the same way, dharma becomes orthodoxy in its negative context, it becomes a cult, while in its positive aspect it is a force to open up new dimensions of consciousness. The same thing applies to moksha. In its negative aspect, moksha becomes a very strong karma while in its positive aspect, it is a state of liberation.

We have not yet been able to attain integration of these four aspects of our life. We fluctuate a lot. Attainment of moksha is not a need, it is an outcome of living a proper life which is ruled by dharma, and balanced by karma and artha.

Can anyone and everyone chant *Om*? Is it so easy?

Yes, the chanting of the mantra *Om* is very easy and it can be done at any time, for cerebral, mental, physical and personality relaxation.

Could you talk about the inner relationship between guru and disciple? Does one require some special ability or a particular kind of personality to be able to have this kind of relationship? What is the difference between this kind of inner experience of guru and the inner guru?

The inner guru is the awakening of the guru's force in the life, body and personality of the disciple. It is the flowering of the guru's energy manifesting inside.

The word *guru* means 'dispeller of darkness'. The guru can be a person but it can also be a concept or a thought. It can be anything. The inner guru is something which helps you to overcome the limiting traits of your nature, and to have a broader vision concerning yourself and the cosmos.

For some people the guru is a book, and for many the guru is a living presence or an idea of faith and devotion.

For the Sikhs, the ultimate guru is the *Guru Granth Sahib*. The main text and guru, which they follow with the utmost reverence and faith, is a compilation of the teachings of the ten gurus of their tradition. They do not have physical living gurus. Even the followers of the sanatana spiritual tradition in this region have the Vedas and Upanishads for their gurus.

For many spiritual aspirants gurus are people or forces, while for others the guru is an idea or a concept of divinity for which they have deep inner reverence, respect and faith. Therefore, the concept of guru can change. However, whatever form the guru is for you, simply becomes a means or a medium through which you can overcome your limitations, remove the veil of ignorance and experience the light.

It has been a human trait since the beginning of creation for man to relate to a manifest being. We have always looked to another person to guide us in our process of self-discovery. Therefore, in the modern context, guru means a relationship with a living person who represents the embodiment of an ideal or the fulfilment of a concept.

This fulfilment becomes a very important drive. People who are bhakti-oriented find solace when they go, for example, to the Hare Krishna community. People who are intellectually inclined feel satisfaction when they visit somebody like, say Swami Chinmayananda, who is a highly intellectual person. People of all shapes, colours and sizes feel attracted towards a person like Swami Satyananda.

In order to experience the inner guru, some effort has to be made by the disciple or aspirant whereby he is able to drop his defences and allow the force of the guru to transform his entire being from inside. If you want to take a bath, you have to first take off your clothes. If you have a job to do then you have to adopt the appropriate method. If you want to experience the inner guru, you have to do something. What do you have to do?

You have to surrender. As long as the barriers of “I am a distinct person from the guru” and “I am the judge of my

guru's instructions" remain, you will not experience the inner guru no matter how much you may desire to from the deepest core of your being. This is because the feeling of duality, *dvaita bhava*, remains. There is the notion of 'I' and 'He'; there is the notion of 'me' and 'the guru' as being separate beings.

The two words 'but' and 'and' do not exist in surrender. 'But' represents the ego, 'and' represents one's ambitions. If you surrender, you will experience the inner guru. For this experience, you need to be a different person; you cannot be as you are now. You cannot be what you perceive yourself to be: "I am this person having this idea, this drive, this motivation, this desire, this feeling", no! If that is what you actually are, then it is not really worth your while becoming a disciple. It is unnecessary for you.

If you do not consider yourself as 'I am this; I am that', then it is easier to merge with the wider body of the guru's energy. It allows for more freedom. Otherwise, it is like trying to swim across the river carrying different packs on your back which are pulling you down. The person on the other side says, "Throw off the burden from your back!" and you say, "But it has all my life experiences in it, how can I do that?" Well, if you cannot do it, then sink. Who cares?

The guru is not going to care; he has to care for everyone. Why should he kill himself for the whims of one who does not wish to listen to him? That is the practicality of being a guru. The disciple has to be of a different type, one who can simply say, "Okay, all my burdens are off, I have created freedom of movement. Now what do I do?"

After reading a book on astral travelling by T. A. Rampa, one of my friends did dhyana on the bindu point and felt that his pranas were being sucked out. After struggling for some time, he managed to get his prana back, but in the meantime his pupils had left their proper place and he had a terrible headache. He only improved after treatment by doctors. Why did such a thing happen? Are astral travelling and what we do in yoga nidra, when we take the consciousness outside, the same?

It is always better to put yourself under the guidance of a teacher. When one attempts to do something in spiritual life without fully knowing one's personality, then there is always failure, because here we are dealing with subtle forces which have the power to totally change one's body, mind and destiny.

We do not even know what our body, mind and emotions are really like. We cannot even control our own reactions, and if we start messing about with our psychic nature without any previous preparation, then of course we are going to become lunatics and lose self-control. Therefore, always put yourself under guidance. Not only that, be rigid, be strong, be firm in your belief that you will not attempt anything out of your own head. That is one of the prerequisites of sadhana in yoga.

Regarding the similarities between astral travelling and yoga nidra, astral travel is a part or stage of yoga nidra. Yoga nidra in itself is a very big subject having many different stages. The preliminary stage begins with relaxation of the body. Subsequently, different aspects of knowing and perception are included in the practices. You know about the feelings of heat, cold, pain, pleasure, lightness, heaviness, seeing the three bodies, seeing the golden cord, etc. Astral travelling does come in another stage of yoga nidra, but it is not the aim of yoga nidra. The aim of yoga nidra is to awaken the unconscious mind. Therefore, do not attempt astral travelling; begin with the first stage, relaxation of the body.

In yoga we have the symbol, *Om Ham Ksham*. Why? Why do we chant *Om* twenty-seven times? Why do we chant *Om* three times at the beginning of class?

For the first question, I suggest you read the *Kundalini Tantra*, published by Yoga Publications Trust, because the whole concept of *Om Ham Ksham* and ajna chakra is given there. The chakras have to be understood in the context of energy centres and centres of manifest states of consciousness. The meaning of these energy centres or chakras and their influence should be known by those who are keen on developing their potential.

One must have this knowledge so that, in the course of time, we can have a proper understanding of our experiences as a means to personal inner growth, and not just take them as dreamlike experiences or fantasy. The theory of kundalini yoga should be understood by people although it is not necessary for them to practise kundalini yoga, because they are not yet prepared.

We practise *Om* chanting twenty-seven times because twenty-seven is an auspicious number and you should try to complete a minimum of twenty-seven rounds. In yoga, three numbers are considered important – twenty-seven (two plus seven equals nine), fifty-four (five plus four equals nine), one hundred and eight (one plus zero plus eight equals nine). Nine is considered to be a lucky number by the yogis. Therefore, twenty-seven is good enough to begin with. Twenty-seven *Oms* induce the state of pratyahara, fifty-four induce the state of dharana, and one hundred and eight induce the state of dhyana.

When you practise *Om* chanting twenty-seven times with the breath, without any agitation, but with total calmness of mind, then the mind has to dissociate itself from objects of like and dislike and come to central point of concentration, which is the chanting of *Om*. This withdrawal of the mind and senses from the external environment of objects, and the coming to the centre, occurs after about ten minutes of chanting. This coming back to the inner point is the state of pratyahara.

Once you reach the inner point, start focusing yourself and resist external pulls. The effort that you make to remain at one point is the effort of dharana. Dharana can be experienced when you cross twenty-seven and go up to fifty-four. If you do not believe me, try it yourself tonight.

Once you reach fifty-four, the state of dhyana begins where you are totally fixed on one point. If you can remain focused at this one point, without deviating or being influenced by any thought, subtle emotion or the external environment, then the state of dhyana can be experienced with the chanting of one hundred and eight *Oms*. You can try it tonight with twenty-seven *Oms*. Before beginning, observe your mental

state, and then observe it after twenty-seven, after fifty-four, and again after one hundred and eight rounds.

According to tradition, the three dimensions of human existence have to be harmonized and unified. The first is the physical dimension. When we chant the first *Om*, the physical dimension is being balanced. With the second *Om*, the mental dimension is being balanced and with the third *Om*, the spiritual dimension is being balanced. Therefore, the harmony and integration of the faculties of spirit, mind and body are symbolized in the chanting of three *Oms* at the beginning and end of any class.

Please give a comparison between the philosophies of Patanjali and Shankaracharya.

The *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali are the most well known, authentic and authoritative text on the principles of raja yoga, which comprises of eight limbs. These eight limbs are directed towards preparing the total human personality on the subtle, mental and emotional levels, to experience what Patanjali calls 'the light'.

The ultimate aim of yoga, according to Patanjali, is to experience the light, which is the source of all knowledge. In order to have that realization, we must pass through the different states of mental preparation, through the connection of our awareness, the attainment of one-pointedness, the process of correcting our expressions and obtaining a deep insight into our mental functions and modifications. Then we come to the point where the total self is eventually seen and experienced as light.

Whether Shankaracharya gave a commentary on the *Yoga Sutras* is not known. There is a possibility that he did, because in his commentaries he touched upon every kind of subject, mainly related to vedantic philosophy which advocated monism, and yogic philosophy which aims at attaining the same realization through a process of discipline.

Shankaracharya touched upon the lifestyle and intellect of the people through his description of karma kanda, jnana

kanda and upasana kanda. *Jnana kanda* means rational understanding and interpretation. *Upasana kanda* means understanding through the mind by awakening the faculties of the heart. Shraddha, bhakti, awareness and concentration are all part of the process of upasana. Karma kanda, jnana kanda and upasana kanda are the three major pillars of vedantic philosophy. Whatever or whoever Brahman may be, it can be acknowledged and experienced through karma kanda, jnana kanda and upasana kanda. Ultimately, one attains the realization, “I am the supreme Brahman, the expanding consciousness.”

To me it seems logical that Shankaracharya would write a commentary on another system, to give a structure based upon a set of disciplines such as yoga and physical disciplines achieved through the practices of asana and pranayama. This system aimed at harmonizing and balancing the structures of the body, and has for example, a set of practices for regulating the breath in order to induce concentration of the mental faculties.

Shankaracharya, in the process of maturing, realizing and awakening his genius, would have come across the basic principles of yoga, and he would have practised dharana in order to have siddhis, because he actually used his psychic powers many times. He would have come across various aspects of yoga such as pranayama, the chakras and kundalini. Being aware of the effects of the yoga practices, his writings would have reflected, further endorsed, and not negated the yogic practices which very likely enabled him to become what he was, especially the practices of mental and inner concentration.

Of course, from his intellectual viewpoint he has given the colour of the Advaita Vedanta philosophy to yoga. That is one way to experience Brahman. Brahman does not necessarily have to be experienced through the hundreds of identities that manifest in the realm of maya, Prakriti and Purusha. In the theory of Samkhya, which was incorporated into the theories of yoga, and in the concepts of Vedanta, they are not distinct from each other.

Yoga is not the Patanjali Sutras and they are not pure Samkhya. Patanjali has simply used the language of Samkhya to describe the process of yoga. When he talks of Ishwara, Purusha or even refers to Prakriti, he has mentioned that everything which manifests in the human personality has a definite form. A thought has a form and a shape, an emotion has a form and a shape, and these forms and shapes reflect an idea, a concept which is unique in its own way. This individual uniqueness of every expression of life is the concept of the many purushas of Samkhya.

According to the concepts of Vedanta, ideas shape an object, whatever name we may give it. Being a unique field of perception, it is purusha – it has a form. These forms, according to Vedanta, belong to the realm of *maya*, ‘illusion’, they are non-permanent. Samkhya, on the other hand, says, “Consider them to be illusory if you have that kind of higher mentality, but nevertheless, while you are experiencing them, they are real.” If someone gives you a slap, the pain you feel is real, it is not an illusion. If you pinch your own body, the pain of the pinch is real, it is not illusory. Everything that happens is real and therefore, anything that is experienced at any given moment is one of the many expressions of purusha.

Vedanta, on the other hand, says, “Yes, but your life is not a momentary life. It is an eternal life and in the eternity of life, moments are fleeting. You may be sad today but happy tomorrow, that does not reflect your real nature.” Yoga contains the ideas of both Samkhya and Vedanta.

Whether we study the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali, or the forms of psychic yoga or kriya yoga or kundalini yoga, the entire purpose is to experience one’s real nature, and in that experience, the philosophy of both Samkhya and Vedanta find their place, whatever our real nature may be: Brahman, ‘the light’ or samadhi.

After discovering our real nature we shall live, behave, think and act in a specific way. After the river has merged with the ocean, it is bound to take upon itself the qualities of the

ocean. Once the river mixes with the ocean, there is no way of separating one from the other. Similarly, yoga has adopted the principles of both the Samkhya and Vedanta systems.

Is it possible to define enlightenment in a way one can understand without being enlightened? Some say it takes one thousand lifetimes, some that it is the only thing worth aiming at, others say that we are already enlightened, and still others say that it is better to think of the present, the more practical aspects of life, and forget about enlightenment. Which way should one follow?

No idea. I cannot answer this question. I do not have that kind of knowledge or understanding, but I do have a belief which I will share with you.

The process of evolution is a progression from one stage of life to the next. The growth of consciousness and energy is an ascending experience of one's manifest awareness. There are no divisions between one state and the next. There is, rather, a smooth merger of one state into the other, and if one can be constantly aware and alert concerning the process taking place, then that awareness will lead to different altered states of consciousness called enlightenment.

Just as when you dive deep into the ocean the light becomes dimmer and dimmer until all grows dark, one moves naturally and spontaneously through these different layers of perception. The final perfection, or the final enlightenment, is never truly final, because the moment you get from point A to point B you will find that you have another step to take to reach point C. One has to take continuous steps, and each step represents a state of perfection. There is no such thing as the ultimate or final perfection or even ultimate enlightenment.

Therefore, the yogis have always propagated the theory of 'be here now'. Be present in the step you have taken, do not think of the previous step and do not have any expectation of better steps in the future. Yogis have always believed that by being fully in the present and by finely tuning oneself to the

maximum in the present, on the physical, sensual, sensorial, mental, emotional, psychic and spiritual planes, the resulting integrity of life will be completely fulfilling.

It sometimes becomes difficult for us to change a pattern of thinking, seeing or believing. A person might go through a very harsh, disturbing and conflicting stage in life, so much so that his entire inner faith is shaken. It becomes very difficult for that kind of person to know what to believe and what not to believe when they encounter a different situation or environment. It happens to quite a lot of people. Then the tendency arises to escape into the known areas where, by avoiding the conflict and fear, one tries to gain security, satisfaction, comfort and fulfilment.

However, wherever one goes, the repressed item always comes up in one form or the other. The individual finds it difficult to adapt to the present and escapes into a cell of security, which was created because of a disturbed period in our past. It will always come up in the form of a pattern of thinking, a particular belief or an expression which will reflect itself in our actions and interactions.

The aim of the practices of yoga is to increase the range of human perception: physical, mental, emotional, psychic and spiritual. This resulting experience of completeness is a state of enlightenment called *sahaja samadhi*, spontaneous enlightenment, and there are many states to pass through before coming to a point where we can say we have understood the process of enlightenment.

Can music influence the environment and the inner state of an individual, and can it be used as a therapy?

Yes, music can change the entire environment and inner state of an individual. It can also affect nature if it is played properly. The masters who were able to perfect the ragas had control over the elements. For example, we have the recorded history of Tansen, one of the greatest musicians of India during the Mughal period. When he sang, he lit lamps with his perfect pitch and combination of notes. He could

make raindrops fall and create storms through his singing. The different combinations of notes in music have such inherent power that they can change the entire structure of nature, if sung at the correct pitch.

I personally consider music to be a very important sadhana for those who want to attain spiritual enlightenment. If suitable music is played to someone suffering from a headache, within ten minutes the pain goes away. Therefore, it is also very effective as a therapy.

In order to make music a yogic process, when playing, strive to become the notes of the scale yourself. Not only the fingers and mind but the entire body should become the note which is being played. Music is a very big sadhana, especially the practice of using the classical notes to purify the chakras.

What is the importance of Kartika Poornima?

According to myth and tradition, Kartika Poornima is the day when Krishna performed his Rasa Lila – the dance with the gopis. This was the one full moon when he had time. At other times he used to be too busy trying to run away from the hit list of the government. It represents the Krishna of enlightened consciousness, while the gopis represent the different manifestations of nature. The vibrations or waves in the atmosphere at this time are conducive to any kind of effort being made to attain higher realization. Kartika Poornima is a good alignment of planets that is considered to be very auspicious for psychic development, so yogis make different types of sankalpas and practise meditation at this time.

How can we change an undesirable and habitual pattern of behaviour once we have recognized it?

First, take a sankalpa, a resolve or decision that you can live without that undesirable element, and then it will be possible to renounce it. However, you will still come across a difficulty. When it comes to the final point, you will not wish to leave that unwanted element. You may say, “I will do it” or, “I can

do it when the time comes”, but definitely it is not going to be possible. Therefore, this question actually has no answer.

If you have gone some way in your sadhana, then you are bound to have a strong, creative and positive will. It is only a strong, creative and positive will which has the ability to change that undesirable element in the personality. Sadhana can take any form. For Milarepa, it was just service, no sitting, listening to the discourses of his guru, no meditation, no pranayama – nothing. It was just hard work.

Why do you chant the Mahamrityunjaya mantra?

At our ashram, it is a tradition that every Saturday evening we all get together and chant the Mahamrityunjaya mantra for the welfare, happiness and health of the whole of humanity. We chant especially for those who have requested specific help to improve their life, to get relief from some ailment or mental conflict, or to have harmony and peace within their family or personality. Whatever the reason or request may be, we pray for their welfare.

This tradition was started in the ashram by Sri Swamiji in 1986, on the eve of the birth centenary of our param guru, Swami Sivananda Saraswati, and has continued ever since. We receive requests from people from all corners of the world to include them or their friends and relatives in the chanting of this universal prayer. It is extremely powerful and we chant it one hundred and eight times. It is also done in our other ashrams throughout the world. You can also do it at home. Mahamrityunjaya mantra is as follows:

*Om trayambakam yajamahe sugandhim pushtivardhanam;
urvaarukamiva bandhanaat mrityormukshiya maamritat.*

Are people who do not practise yoga really unhappy?

No, we cannot consider them to be unhappy. In many ways, they are definitely happier than yoga practitioners. Many people have everything they aspire for, many have adjusted to different situations, work styles and lifestyles, and many

are seeking to create a dramatic change in their way of life. In fact, it is only a minority that are unhappy, and their unhappiness is not due to just one single reason. There might be thousands of reasons. The family or work situation can be a cause for unhappiness, others can be ambition, or the desire for security, contentment and satisfaction.

Many people are totally satisfied and do not feel the need to change, and also there are people who are searching for alternative ways to hasten the process of having a different vision, a different kind of consciousness. Many people call this process the search for creative energy, or the search for self-realization or God-realization.

Who is happy? Who is unhappy? Some people want a change because something is missing, an ingredient is left out of their life, and that change leads to the attainment of higher consciousness. Ultimately though, you will find that everyone is both unhappy and happy in one way or the other.

There is no such thing as a world outside and a world inside. There is only one nature. The same manifestation of Prakriti governs both the internal experiences and the external experiences. We feel that what we experience inside is different from what is happening outside, so we have coined the words 'inside' and 'outside', when, actually, everything is only the manifestation of one's mind. This is how a sannyasin looks at life.

Sri Swamiji blows the conch in the morning and evening. He also plays the damaru during his panchagni sadhana. Please explain the qualities and effects of these two different sounds, and anything about them relating to sadhana?

According to tradition, the damaru is the musical instrument of Shiva. From the sound created by the damaru came the sounds of the Sanskrit language. Since that sound is associated with the birth of Sanskrit and the totality of language, it is responsible for the removal of ignorance from this manifest dimension. The sound of the damaru

is associated with the elimination of karmas and the birth of *vidya* or wisdom. That is the symbolic reason for playing the damaru.

The conch is the musical instrument of Vishnu, the second figure in the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Quite a few years ago, an experiment was conducted in Berlin University where the researchers blew the conch and observed the effects produced in the atmosphere. They reported that all the bacteria and viruses in the immediate vicinity died. The blowing of the conch is also a way of begging for auspicious results for something good being done for selfless reasons. Auspiciousness is symbolized by the blowing of the conch.

Both the damaru and the conch are used by yogis who are following a particular line of sadhana in order to awaken, stimulate and direct the surrounding energies which, in the course of time, can influence first the peripheral environment and then the world.

Please talk to us about initiation. I want very much to receive it as the greatest blessing in my life, because I feel your love filling my existence.

Initiation is a new beginning. To initiate means to start something new. The Sanskrit word for initiation is *diksha*, which is derived from the root *dik*, meaning 'having the ability to see' or 'to have a new vision'. Initiation gives one the ability to see another area or dimension of life. This new vision is not related with the physical eyes, but with mental awareness, with the faculties of inner cognition.

If we are sincere in our spiritual practice, we will go through many changes in our attitudes, beliefs and thinking, in our behaviour and mental performance, and in our understanding of energy and consciousness. As we gain new insights, our lifestyle, perceptions and performance also change.

There are different forms of diksha, but the main dikshas are two in number. One is known as *yoga diksha*, initiation

into yoga. In yoga diksha we have *nama diksha*, the giving of a spiritual name, *mantra diksha*, the giving of a mantra, and *sankalpa diksha*, initiation into the mysteries of yoga.

The other form of diksha is *ashram diksha*. In ashram diksha, there are different lifestyles that bring you in tune with your inner nature and make you aware of the need to develop and cultivate certain qualities. In ashram diksha, the main form of diksha is sannyasa diksha in the different stages of jignasu, karma, and poorna. So, do not ask for ashram diksha until and unless you are sure that you can handle the changes in your lifestyle and be committed to cultivating different qualities in yourself. However, you can definitely ask for the common mantra and nama diksha.

What is the system of sankalpa diksha?

Well, if I tell you, it will not be a mystery any more. It has to remain a secret.

Who can ask for it?

Anybody can ask for it, but it is the initiator who has to decide whether to give it or not.

But the initiate has to know what they are asking for!

That is why this form of diksha is not a commonly known diksha.

Can you just give us an idea of it?

No, absolutely not. It is a matter of transmission between master and disciple. One does not know what form it takes, but a transfer of energy takes place. It can happen just by sight or touch, it can happen by thought and it can happen through a dream. It is the transmission of energy, which is the mysterious aspect of yoga, and how that happens, do not ask me!

As for the question about who is ready for initiation, you have to ask yourself the question, "Am I ready?" If there is some kind of yes/no conflict or doubt, then you had better not

take initiation; you must work upon yourself more. You can always depend upon the answer of the teacher, but then you must have total faith in him or her. It should not be that today you say, “I am taking initiation because the teacher has said so” and tomorrow you say, “This teacher is not good enough.” No, you cannot have that kind of attitude. You have to answer this question yourself, “Am I ready or not?” and when you feel that inner urge, when you feel that deep desire which bypasses the intellect, just like hunger, thirst or even diarrhoea, that is it. There are no two ways about it – you are ready!

A person once came to Ramakrishna Paramahansa while he was taking a bath in the middle of the river, and shouted from the shore, “Look, I have a great desire and deep inner yearning to meet God.” Ramakrishna looked at him and said, “I can’t hear you.” Again he said, “I am going to kill myself if I don’t see God. I have this deep desire to see God!” Ramakrishna said, “You are too far away, I can’t hear you. Come in.” So the person waded in and when he came near, Ramakrishna grabbed him by the neck and thrust him under the water. The person started to fight for breath and nearly drowned. He struggled to come up for air. After he had consumed a quantity of water Ramakrishna allowed him to come up and said, “Did you feel the desire for God with the same intensity as you craved for air?” The person had no answer because that intensity had not been there; it was only an intellectual search. If the intensity is truly there, then questions need not be asked – they are already answered.

What guidelines do you consider important to follow when teaching yoga?

In teaching yoga there has to be clear communication between teacher and student. The teacher should not only consider what has to be taught, but also understand the receptivity of the student. He should not envisage the practice as he would do it.

If I am teaching yoga and I pick the newest student in the group who has not had any yogic background, and forgetting

about the others, direct my instructions to him, I know that they can easily be understood by the others who are ahead of him, even if it is a multilingual class.

I also have to decide how much physical participation there should be from my side. Physical participation can be of two types: first, in the form of demonstration, actually walking around and correcting everybody, and second, sitting static, keeping the eyes open and being on top of what is happening. This has to be decided as soon as the class comes together, keeping in mind who is attending the class and what has to be taught.

If a totally new group of asanas is being taught to an advanced class, then somebody from the advanced class can be called up for the demonstration and the teacher can continue working with the group. If it is an intermediate class, the teacher can sit and keep his eyes and ears open and speak. Therefore, the best way to teach has to be decided from the beginning, whether it is sitting in one place and giving instructions, or actually being present amidst the group. I find the latter aspect helpful in opening up channels of communication.

When you give instructions, they must be clear and not given using garbled words. If it is a multilingual class, the best method is to introduce some keywords before the session and explain what they mean. After that you can continue with the class. For example, one key phrase could be “Hari Om”, so whenever the students hear the words “Hari Om”, they realize they should react in a particular way. For example, if the eyes are closed, they should open them. If they are lying down and they hear the words “Hari Om” they should get up. In this way, you have given them a keyword and the way to understand or react to the use of that word. The participation of the students can then be synchronized, rather than leaving them to look here and there at what the other students are doing.

In the beginning of a class, whether one starts with the shanti mantras or *Om* chanting, time should be given to

make the students physically calm. To allow their bodies to settle down takes at least five minutes. A short period of physical awareness combined with *Om* chanting and the shanti mantras is about the right time needed for this. The beginning is important.

Sometimes there are long gaps between one practice and another. In that period of silence it is easy for the mind to start going outside. Therefore, to reduce that gap, the general rule is that between each sentence the gap should be seven to fifteen seconds. Even in yoga nidra and meditation there has to be a continuous verbalization to hold the attention of the class on what is being said and done. Actually, the class teacher has to become a chatterbox, allowing the shortest time for silent periods between each practice of asana or pranayama. You just have to keep saying something, even if it is, “Have mental awareness of the breath.”

For example, you are teaching nadi shodhana pranayama and you have told them to do five rounds. They do the first, second and third round. If you remain silent all this time, their thoughts will go somewhere else, their concentration will waver. However, one instruction from the speaker: “Mental awareness of the breath”, even if repeated every round, will help the student to have control over the mind. Or, regarding postures, at the time of changeover from one side to the next, give them the simple instruction, “Be aware of the body.” That will allow them to bring their awareness back to the body.

These are only a few guidelines to help you, but remember that teaching is a sadhana in itself. It is the duty of a teacher not to teach something he has not experienced personally. It is also his duty to know as much as possible in order to be a better guide.

Could you tell us something about bhakti?

You should not look at bhakti as a mystical or spiritual expression of yourself; rather, you should see it as a means to come closer to the divine nature that exists within you.

Previously, I have mentioned that God has two powers. One power is known as *maya*, the force of illusion which takes one away from God. The other power is known as *bhakti*, the force of devotion which brings one closer to God. Maya and bhakti are two diametrically opposed forces of God's divinity. Therefore, just as you are involved in the world and the experience of maya, you have to make an effort to become involved in the experience of bhakti, but this has to be understood clearly.

Those who live in the world of maya, condition themselves according to the laws of nature, of maya, according to self-made laws. The laws of nature and maya become *bhagya*, or destiny. The laws that we create in our own minds become karma. Therefore, destiny and karma belong to the realm of maya.

It can definitely be said that in the world of maya we are completely dominated by our senses, mental expressions, egos and attachments. The expression of the human personality is not of bhakti, and bhakti is definitely not thinking about God. Bhakti is not an imposed discipline; rather, it is the process of unravelling the personality from the bondage of maya.

In order to experience bhakti, the power that can bring you closer to your divine nature, there are certain conditions that one must fulfil. One condition is learning to be simple. Simplicity does not mean that you reduce the external needs, become a beggar and try to lead a natural life. No, simplicity here refers to mental states; acquiring the ability to be innocent despite a very high intellect, despite having a very keen and sharp mind. Simplicity is a natural expression of a mind at rest. Thus, you have to make an effort to be at rest. Not 'RIP' – rest in peace, but 'RIH' – rest in harmony. Harmony is the quality of mind which needs to be developed in order to experience simplicity in life. Harmony and simplicity are the two important keys to bhakti. Bhakti represents a state of being where there is no conflict of ego and self, or

with the external environment. It also implies acceptance, understanding, wisdom, knowledge and awareness. The moment you stop fighting with yourself and accept situations, you attain harmony.

This harmony leads to the experience of simplicity; the spontaneous, unconditioned expression of the inner forces and energies. This is a very important aspect of bhakti. Struggling against the current of life is maya. Flowing with the current of life is bhakti. Of course, the definition and concept of bhakti changes from person to person. Remember that whatever form of bhakti you choose, the ultimate aim is the attainment of purity, of unconditioned consciousness. For this, you must work hard on yourself.

Human beings tend to live in three chakras: mooladhara, swadhisthana and manipura, and never utilize the force of the higher chakras. Even in practical life people are living in mooladhara, swadhisthana or manipura.

Mooladhara represents hard and strong attraction to sensory and sensual pleasures, swadhisthana represents insecurities and fears, and manipura represents a very strong personal, self-orientated drive, desire, ambition and craving. These are the chakras that are active in every individual. I am not saying they are awakened. Awakening of these three chakras only takes place with the rising of kundalini. That is different, but prior to awakening they become active and they are active in us right now.

Very few of us have actually experienced the higher chakras. The emotions which express currently are not anahata emotions, rather, they are emotions coloured by the power manifesting in mooladhara, swadhisthana and manipura. We have never experienced pure emotion. We have never experienced true emotion. Psychologists and psychiatrists talk about emotions, but please remember that these emotions are always influenced by the attributes of mooladhara, swadhisthana or manipura.

Whatever emotions we have expressed in our lives until now, whether positive, in the form of affection, compassion,

joy and happiness, or negative, in the form of hatred, jealousy, greed, and anger, have not been pure. They are always tainted by the three lower chakras. We have not gone beyond manipura. Even those people who think their heart chakra is opening up are deluding themselves, because the opening of anahata is a transcendental experience.

Mooladhara, swadhisthana and manipura represent the world of maya; anahata, vishuddhi and ajna represent pure unconditioned feeling; providing one has the ability to transcend one's worldly nature and intuitively become one with other people and the environment. These three higher chakras belong to the realm of bhakti. After ajna is sahasrara, here the experience of God takes place.

Therefore, whatever form of bhakti you practise, please remember that its expression should be free from every kind of influence of mooladhara, swadhisthana and manipura. Then one's pure nature can be experienced.

To do karma yoga in the ashram is relatively simple. However, outside the ashram it is very different. For instance, when we have to organize our own karma yoga and money is involved, or deadlines have to be reached, then we are doing karma yoga with ambition. Is that wrong? Can you also tell us about dharma and how we can know if we are following our dharma?

What we consider to be karma is actually known as *aachar*, which means interaction. Interaction happens on many different levels at the same time. It happens within the individual in relation to feelings, emotions, thoughts, samskaras, ambitions, aspirations and so forth. It also happens externally between the individual and others, whether family members, friends or strangers, and on a social and global level as well. This interaction creates certain impressions in the subtle and gross nature of the personality, and this moulds the consciousness into a particular shape or frame.

When our consciousness has been moulded in a particular way over which we have absolutely no control, nor even any

knowledge that it has been done, then those karmas are very difficult to recognize, accept and eliminate. I will give you an example: someone smokes *bidis*, Indian cigarettes, or chews *khaini*, tobacco. They did not come into this world with the karma of smoking. It started off as a status symbol. "Everyone is smoking, so why not me? Let me try it." Later on, it becomes a habit and still later, a part of them, so that if they want to stop smoking today they have to struggle and fight. This is a visible karma that must be faced. If they struggle and fight, they will go into depression and have withdrawal symptoms which will create further problems.

If a simple act of smoking can create such a change in normal perceptions, imagine what kind of impressions the consciousness is carrying from many other habits. Our personality, beliefs and mentality are such that it is very difficult, even impossible, to get rid of karmas and impressions of karmas.

In brief, karma is interaction that takes place on the physical, subtle, causal and spiritual levels. Some we can deal with. Some create depression and anxiety, and some create total conflict in the personality. Some even create conflict in morality, and like this, the ball keeps rolling.

Now let us talk about karma yoga. The concept of karma yoga is very unique and interesting. Karma yoga is generally believed to be the 'yoga of action' where we perform actions with a balanced attitude and in a frame of mind free from craving, expectation or depression. This is our normal concept of karma yoga, and we feel that this attitude or aspect of karma yoga is ultimate. In karma yoga the actions are surrendered to God or a higher nature. If we surrender our actions, then there is no problem. Our personal attachments and egos are not involved and therefore, we remain mentally free. Surrendering the action also becomes a part of karma yoga.

When we find ourselves confronted with different situations in which our ambitions play a predominant role, the practice of karma yoga becomes very difficult. Like the questioner

rightly said, if you have to meet a deadline, or earn money for meeting individual and family requirements, then of course this attitude of karma yoga is difficult to maintain.

One thing we have failed to realize is how karma yoga actually affects the total personality. Performing action is just the external, physical aspect of karma yoga, while surrendering expectation of the result is the mental aspect. However, there is another aspect of karma yoga, the real aspect, which is neither physical nor mental but a natural outcome of practice.

Karma yoga enables us to develop immunity from the positive and negative aspects of life, good and bad, pleasure and pain, etc. This is the most important aspect of karma yoga that must be understood. We cannot escape the work that involves the selfish motive of providing for the family, or meeting deadlines and so on, because that is a necessity and requirement of life, however, we can definitely develop immunity to the results obtained from our actions. In this way, we will not be buffeted by the swings of the individual mind or nature.

Karma yoga is not the yoga of action, but of developing immunity from the fruits of, or the reactions to, our action. Karma is something that happens and keeps on happening continuously and naturally, and karma yoga is developing immunity from the results or the effects of those karmas. It is in this context that you will have to revise your understanding of karma yoga.

The next question was on dharma. Dharma is a part and parcel of life. It means having conscious knowledge of the obligations which lead to the constructive expression of our nature. I have used the word 'obligation' here; obligation in terms of knowledge of one's duty and how one has to act in any given situation. This knowledge is known as dharma, and the definition of *dharma* according to the tradition is a quality which you imbibe and express. It is a state of mind and being in which you are able to express yourself creatively and competently and which is beneficial to all concerned. In

this context, dharma can also mean perfection in action.

Dharma can also mean being balanced in thought, or having a discriminating nature. Knowing what is right and what is wrong and acting accordingly is known as *viveka*. Another component of dharma is being established in one quality of life. Dharma can mean many things, it does not have just one meaning. In order to understand what dharma is, you will have to understand the totality of life.

The concept of dharma that we have today is a very derogatory one. Some people even say dharma is a religion, but it is not. Dharma is the totality of constructive expression which not only assists your process of growth but also assists social, global and universal growth. If you want to practise dharma, begin with karma yoga. Then move into bhakti yoga because bhakti yoga generates universal, unconditioned love, not conditioned and selfish love. Next move to jnana yoga. All these different stages which lead to yogic perfection will take you to the knowledge of dharma.

Are there ghosts in Ganga Darshan?

You will often find many ghosts in ashrams. They come here for peace, and in every building lives a guardian spirit and nobody should be afraid of them. There is one in Jyoti Mandir who sometimes plays the big drum. People have gone there to see who is playing the drum in the middle of the night, and they find that nobody is there, but the big drum can be heard nonetheless.

I met the one in Kutir in 1983 when I first came back and I made friends with it. One night I woke up, opened my eyes and there was this huge dark shadow looming over my mosquito net. I just froze in bed. Then I realized it was not the shadow of a mosquito but a real ghost. I communicated with it and we became friends.

How do you make friends with them? How do you communicate? By being silent?

Through thought transmission.

You referred to *hasna yoga*. What is that?

There is an aspect of yoga known as *hasna yoga*, meaning the yoga of laughter. You may not believe it, but there are very few people who laugh. Most of the time we are so preoccupied with ourselves that we miss many opportunities to laugh. Laughter is a very effective way to release the pressure of sorrow from the mind. Just as you eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner, you should also have time to laugh in a way that you actually start rolling on the floor. That is very important.

Begin laughing in the morning when you get up and go to the bathroom. When you look at the silly face that stares at you from the mirror, start laughing. You have to consider that person inside the mirror, the reflection, to be your silly self. Just look at that, see the five o'clock shadow, the droopy eyes, the dopey face, and start smiling and laughing. And the real thing is that if you can laugh heartily then your image continues to look stupid, and does not laugh. That is the real *hasna yoga*.

Believe it or not, this first morning laughter will change your whole day. Try it tomorrow morning. In the ashram you may have difficulties finding mirrors, so just grab anybody who comes in front of you. Start looking at her and laughing!

Is the use of *siddhis* good or bad?

We are not qualified to judge. There are different dimensions of the actions of realized beings or people who have attained a degree of mastery over their minds. Philosophically speaking, it is mentioned in the dharma shastras that as one progresses in spiritual life, *siddhis* are attained and not dropped by God's grace into your lap. They represent one state of perfection and mastery over a particular dimension of the personality. If one attains mastery over, say, the unconscious mind, of course new experiences of the unconscious manifest and can be recognized as *siddhis*. At that stage, the boundaries between time, space and object disappear, and one becomes capable of directing those

faculties of consciousness for any reason or purpose one deems fit.

Tradition says that misuse of such siddhis or powers is not permitted in spiritual life, as they can bind human nature further to karmas and the mundane, gross manifestations of Prakriti. This is applicable for people like us because we do not have any mastery over our minds. It is like handing a small child a loaded gun to play with. When the trigger is pulled in ignorance the shot is going to come out of the gun and it may not have a positive result!

In relation to spiritual life we are still children. We do not know with what kind of understanding or vision those people who have attained siddhis choose to use or not use their powers. Whether it is Christ, Sri Swamiji, Sai Baba or anyone, they have their reasons for displaying or not displaying them. I do not think it is worth speculating whether it is good or bad to use siddhis because we have not yet attained that level of understanding or knowledge.

Swami Sivananda was opposed to the setting up of ashrams, the construction of buildings and the accumulation of facilities. Are you not doing the opposite of what he said?

You might be doing the opposite of what he said, but we certainly are not! I do not think that Swami Sivananda was opposed to the idea of ashrams; rather, he made the ashram possible for people so that they could go there and be in tune with the universal harmony. I would say that he inspired the birth of the ashram and its construction and facilities. He himself laid the foundation stone, not only of the Divine Life Society, but also of the Vishwanath Temple, the Yoga Vedanta Forest Academy and the Yoga Vedanta Press. He created these four institutions. So, you cannot say that he was opposed to this idea. If he had been opposed to it, then no one would know about him today.

Swami Sivananda had a vision. Whatever he did was for others, not for himself. He never identified with what he had done, in the way that we identify with what is ours.

He was not attached to anything. He was not attached to any possession, or to any desire or ambition. He was a free person and that is his greatness.

Swami Sivananda tried to make his disciples imbibe this idea, and in our guru, Sri Swamiji, we see the culmination of this. Sri Swamiji was actively involved in the establishment of not only one but many institutions – Bihar School of Yoga, which laid the foundation stone of other ashrams in India and throughout the world, Sivananda Math, the Yoga Research Foundation, and Paramahansa Alakhbara. At the same time, he had the ability to leave everything, to renounce, to forget his life's work. We are not ready to forget our life's work. We want everyone to know about it.

Thus, the question is actually incorrect. Swami Sivananda did not oppose the establishment of the ashram. We are not going against the principles that he established. I pray to Swami Sivananda, to Sri Swamiji and to God to let me also follow in their footsteps so that one day I can be proud of my contribution as a human being, and say, "Yes, I did all this, and at the end I was able to leave it and remain free."

How can we relate the different religions and their beliefs with the philosophy of yoga?

The root of the word 'religion' in Latin is *religare* which means to come back to, to reunite or join. This process of unity or returning represents the coming together or merging of the individual with the divine. The word *yoga* means the same thing – 'to yoke', 'to bind together'. So the words 'yoga' and 'religion' mean basically the same thing, the coming together of two things: one manifest and the other unmanifest; human nature and divine nature.

The main difference in the yogic system is that there are specifically defined practices which deal with moral conduct, the physical body, the mind and the experience of spirit. Take for example *yama* and *niyama* of *ashtanga yoga*. They are used in order to create a positive and creative change in our thinking, behaviour, performance and lifestyle. They

deal with the moral aspect of life. I am sure that every religion puts forward the same ideas, although maybe in a different order.

Yoga goes into the physical aspects. Through the practices of asana and pranayama we balance the entire physical structure. If we are ill, we can get well soon and become healthy by doing yoga. If there is any type of imbalance in the systems of the body or in the brain we can get rid of that imbalance and obtain optimum physical health.

Yoga also deals with the mind. We have tension, anxiety, depression, inhibition and fear. The process through which we can gradually control or eliminate these disturbances from the mental structure is pratyahara and dharana. Then, to cater to our spiritual needs, we have the aspect of dhyana which culminates in samadhi.

There are different personality types. Some people are emotional by nature and feel inclined towards bhakti, ritual, worship and contemplation. Some are intellectual and cannot understand the bhakti aspect. They like to study, analyze, think, rethink, formulate their own ideas and make their own decisions. We can call them jnanis or buddhijivis. Some people are very psychic and perceptive by nature and just flow intuitively with life. Then there is the dynamic type of personality who likes to be always doing and involved in some active expression. Therefore, different practices have evolved for the variety of personality types in order to awaken that predominant faculty to the maximum, and to utilize it to bind the human and divine natures together.

Yoga is very definite about not interfering with anyone's beliefs and religion, and this is why it is being accepted and taught all over the world. Due to this, we have ashrams and swamis teaching yoga in almost every country. In fact, we now have a very active centre in Iran. Just recently I received ten yoga books that have been translated into Persian, the Iranian language. When I was in South America in the early part of the seventies, I taught meditation, pranayama and asana to nuns and priests and had discussions with them.

They felt that the practices of yoga gave them a deeper understanding of their own experiences in prayer, sadhana and meditation.

If we have a clear understanding of how yoga deals with the moral, physical, mental, and spiritual structures independently, by focusing on incorporating the divine areas of our personality into the body, I do not think there can be conflict with any other belief, tradition or religion. Rather, yoga complements the realizations and experiences gained through other traditions and religions. As sannyasins, we follow a different system altogether and that is our personal aspect or belief. Just as you have your own personal aspect, we all have ours which has nothing to do with yoga.

In an inter-religious group, it is possible to have common bhajans of no particular religion in order to cater to all, and that is what we do here. If you go to other ashrams or sadhus, you will always find them doing the same thing. In a temple or a place with a specific religious direction, there are many different objects of worship, but here we use only a jyoti, although traditionally our deity of contemplation is Shiva. Since we have people of every creed, belief and tradition in the ashram, we use the jyoti which represents light. Ultimately, everyone is a light – even the experience of God is light, *prakash*, so that is what we try to emphasize.

Similarly, the mantras that we chant are the prayers and mantras of different traditions. There is a collection of mantras from different religions in our book *Meditations from the Tantras*. In that book, mantras of ancient cultures have also been given. Another one of our books, *Sure Ways to Self-Realization*, gives the theories and practices of every tradition existing today, with the idea that the people who read about them will notice the link between all the different traditions.

Would you like to tell us some more about Sri Swamiji calling us to Rikhia? I would like to know the deeper meaning of these calls.

Well, I do not know the deeper meaning behind Sri Swamiji's calling. I am sure that all of you will be able to interpret it according to your own beliefs and receptivity. Here we are trying to find out the how and why of a connection that is actually transmission from heart to heart. It is not transmission from mind to mind, so everyone will understand why Sri Swamiji has called them in their own way.

Externally there can be many reasons. One reason could be that he has completed five years of his panchagni sadhana, the sadhana of the five fires. In the higher vedic tradition, the five fires represent the fires which burn internally in the form of anger, attachment, passion, desire, ego, etc. We are constantly being burnt by these fires. We are burnt by the fires of desire, passion and ambition. It has been stated in the scriptures, more specifically in the tantric than in the vedic traditions, that those people who have gone beyond the mind, who have overcome the material aspect of life, have subdued the five fires which are both external and internal and have gained command over the elements of nature.

Sri Swamiji is a person who always used to avoid heat. He could never stand it and always lived in a very comfortable environment, but when he started to perform his sadhana he had to handle the heat of the five fires, and the temperature used to range beyond seventy-five to eighty-five degrees Celsius. He did this in summer, from January till the end of June. June is the time when summer here is at its peak, and in this extreme climatic condition he sat with four fires around him and the sun above, and the fire actually used to scorch his body. Many times when he came out from performing his sadhana, his body was like burnt copper, but while he sat there for eight hours daily, he was totally oblivious to everything happening around him, and amazingly enough, he suffered no dehydration, no negative symptom of this extreme exposure to heat.

If we were to try and sit in the sun even for two or three hours we would have high blood pressure, faint or suffer

dehydration. How can a person have such an ability to sustain heat without being affected by it? There must be some form of elemental control, control of the tattwas. It has been stated in the scriptures that when a person is able to manage the heat of the fire externally, only then is it possible for him or her to transcend the mind. Therefore, just from the type of sadhana he is doing we can understand that he has mastery over the natural elements.

In the process of the panchagni sadhana the body converts itself into light. You might have noticed that sadhus and swamis usually identify with fire, more than with any other element. You will find very few sadhus who identify with the earth, because the earth has a very strong attraction or pull, and it is related to mooladhara. You will find very few sadhus who identify with water. Water is never stable and always flows downwards. It represents the transformation of divine nature into mundane, manifest nature. Very few sadhus and swamis identify with air, because air is also not stable. Space is the last stage of infinity – to become as vast as the sky.

All sadhus from the earliest traditions have worshipped fire, not because of some mystical or religious belief, but because fire is pure in essence, luminous, warm, bright, and has the ability to consume everything while remaining unaffected. Therefore, in the sannyasa tradition, fire or a flame is generally seen as a symbol of the spirit, and once somebody identifies totally with the nature or symbol of spirit, it helps them to transcend the physical, material dimension.

For the last five years, Sri Swamiji has been adapting to this new sadhana. It was like a rehearsal for a bigger sadhana which is yet to come and we do not know what that will be. There is a possibility that he will take a sankalpa after this month and decide for how many years he will go into seclusion. It could be for three, ten or fifteen years. That sankalpa will be his choice. Since people know where he is, they try to go there whenever possible and this disturbs him. Although he does not see anyone it still causes disturbance.

I think one reason for his allowing us this darshan is in order to pacify our minds. He has sent the invitation now, so that later on, he can once again isolate himself, and go undisturbed into the deeper sadhana for which he has rehearsed so much.

Sri Swamiji is a visionary who is able to assess the future needs of humanity. He has worked instinctively for the propagation of yoga because he knew it would be necessary for people in the future. Thirty years ago, even in India, nobody knew about or accepted yoga as we know it and accept it today. In fact, I would say that there was even greater resistance to yoga in India than in overseas countries. Overseas, people identify with yoga as a physical and mental practice, but in India they identify yoga with something mystical, something which removes and isolates one from society, and nobody wants to be isolated. Now Sri Swamiji must see that people will have a different need in the future.

That has also been my experience. After 1983, while I was outside India for eleven years, I noticed a very big change in the social mentality of Australians and Europeans. People who had been turning to yoga as a physical system for bodily health and wellbeing were now looking at yoga as a means to take them beyond the concepts and identification of the body. Undoubtedly, there are many people still attracted to hatha and raja yoga, but there is an increasing interest in the deeper aspect of yoga which goes beyond the physical dimension.

There may be another reason why Sri Swamiji is calling us. During my month and a half in Europe I must have met between five to ten thousand people from all walks of life; from the topmost physicists to people pushing educational beliefs and systems, from executives and businessmen to people just leading a simple life. I felt very strongly that the age of hatha yoga had left Europe and in its place was now a very sincere and deeper search, not so much into kriya or kundalini, but into the deeper aspects of raja yoga, and more specifically into the practices of pratyahara, dharana

and dhyana. “How can we manage our mind?” was the main question, and also “How can we develop our personality and handle our nature?” I felt that the time had come to make them understand and utilize their inner faculties more and more – not the siddhis or psychic powers, but the normal day to day human qualities of caring, nurturing and sustaining, of being at peace with oneself and others, and of gaining a general understanding about themselves and others.

Over the past five years I have noticed the direction Sri Swamiji’s sadhana has been taking. The concept of incorporating the qualities of love, affection, compassion and devotion are coming very subtly to the fore. In his own way, he is trying to teach us how to develop these four qualities so that we can be more at peace with ourselves and lead a more creative life.

When we are told, “Develop love, develop compassion, develop this and develop that”, the questions always arise, “How are we to do it?” and “Is the love we are expressing now not enough?” “Is the affection and compassion that we are expressing now not sufficient?” The answer is no, it is not, because even in these expressions, our egos, attachments, ambitions and desires are involved. The purity of the qualities of love and devotion is never experienced, rather, it seems that the more we worry about these qualities, the more we distance ourselves from their purity and essence. This is because there is too much ego identification.

As the next phase of our training, I believe that Sri Swamiji is trying to teach us through his own example how we can cultivate those inner qualities so that we can eventually make this world a better place for ourselves and the future generation. Therefore, if you can pick up what he is trying to give you on the subtle level you may find that it is very similar to what I have said just now. I am not saying it will be the same, because this is my understanding, your understanding may be different. I have picked up indications according to my nature; you will pick up indications according to yours.

















A further reason for his calling us, according to my perception of things, is that we have identified and linked ourselves emotionally with a person who has reached a stage we want to achieve. We have identified with a body, an image, and a concept. Now he is trying to make us identify with the essence which has kept him ticking all this time. It is as if he is saying: “Don’t look towards this body, but look towards the force which has kept this body going in a particular direction, on a particular path. Identify with that force rather than with a personality.” If one can identify with the force, one can immediately attain bhakti.

God has two *shaktis*, two forces. One is *maya*, the force of illusion, which takes us away from the essence of God and towards sensory and sensual pleasures and desires. Maya causes us to identify with ‘I’, the ego. The other force or shakti of God is *bhakti*, or devotion, which brings us closer to the divine essence. Thus, the universal power has two forces, one taking us away from the nature of God and the other bringing us closer.

Our mind, attractions, senses, aspirations, motivations, ambitions and the desire for fame represent the force of maya. Many of us take sannyasa due to the force of maya because we want to become something. We do not come to sannyasa due to a spontaneous urge from the heart, or because we want to raise our consciousness to another level, but because we see sannyasa as offering us an opportunity. You may come to this life because of some ambition, because you want to have power or wisdom, that’s okay, but at the same time you should be aware that there is a higher force guiding you, because when that awareness comes, the process of bhakti begins.

How does yoga deal with maya? We identify with the body, diseases, illnesses, aches and pains. We do some asanas and pranayama to harmonize the body, so that the physical imbalances in the realm of maya can be rectified. We identify with our mind, the aspect of emotion and intellect, and what do we find in the realm of maya?

Anxiety, desire, depression, frustration, anger and stress. We deal with the mind by practising meditation, so that we can learn how to pacify the mind and be more at peace with ourselves. The practices of hatha, raja, kriya, kundalini and even mantra yoga allow us to harmonize the disturbances created by the influence of maya.

In order to create total balance, the aspect of *bhakti*, devotion, should also be there, but it should not be perceived in a mystical, spiritual way. Devotion has to be seen from a very practical viewpoint. If one practises true devotion, the forces of consciousness awaken. Devotion itself has the power to transform the entire nature and personality of a person. It can be physical, mental, mystical and spiritual. It can also be intellectual, because devotion is not something separate from the personality; rather, it is the sattwic aspect of the physical, mental, emotional, intellectual and definitely, the spiritual dimensions.

Rajas, tamas and sattwa are the three qualities of nature that control us. Rajas and tamas belong to the world of maya and sattwa to the world of bhakti. Duality belongs to the world of maya. In our body we have two eyes, but yoga says there is a third eye which opens when the other two eyes are closed. One of these eyes is rajas, one is tamas, close both and sattwa awakens. In the cosmic dimension there is only unity, and in the manifest dimension there is duality and sattwa. We can compare it to the third eye where the pure essence, unity and the force of bhakti is experienced and it changes one's entire life. Therefore, another reason why Sri Swamiji has invited us could be to make us aware of this third aspect, sattwa.

I could give you one hundred reasons why Sri Swamiji has invited us, but we will stop here. Those who have eyes will see, those who have ears will hear. That is what it says in the Bible, "Let those who have eyes see, let those who have ears hear." This is a statement by Christ, and this is also the statement in yoga and by those who have reached a state of enlightenment.

How is ego connected with our deep, deep desires?

According to the Samkhya philosophy, the first manifestation between the cosmic and mundane dimensions was that of ego. Ego is the feeling of individuality or separateness. How do I know that I am me and not any other person? How do I realize that I am an individual, different from every other being? This is something which I think nobody has been able to answer. The birth of individuality is the birth of ego which does not happen when we take birth in the physical body, but when we enter the manifest dimension.

Air has an identity and an ego, not in the same way that we express ego, but the identity of individuality is there in the air element. Fire, water and earth also have a particular identity, and the combination of the five elements creates a further identity. Look at a tree. What do you see? You see leaves. You see many other things as well, but the leaves can be seen on the surface. Each leaf is different but it is connected to a branch. Now, why have so many different leaves sprouted on one branch? There is no answer to it, but each has its own identity and that is ego.

As humans, we become more aware of our ego because it identifies itself with the intellect. Through the powers of the intellect or *buddhi* we associate individuality with our actions, aspirations, ambitions, thoughts, needs, qualities, strengths, weaknesses and disabilities. Every identification creates an image of ourselves which is subject to the force of the ego. We can say that the ego is like a branch and each leaf that comes out from that branch is a manifestation of a strength, weakness or need, but each one is connected to the main ego.

Ego has always been taken as the force responsible for creation in the manifest dimension. If you remove ego or the individual identity from the manifest dimension, the whole world will once again become nothing. It will return to its pure nature, like a seed. When planted in the ground the seed can grow to be a shrub and later on a tree. If you destroy the tree the seed will be there in another form. Without the seed a tree will not grow, so ego has been considered to be

the seed of creation. Therefore, there is a very intimate link between ego and every expression of life. In human beings, this ego is experienced more strongly because of our rational, intellectual and analytical involvement, but even in inanimate life forms like a tree, rock or a blade of grass, there is ego identity.

Samkhya philosophy states that we should try to become aware of the ego identity through a process of reflection and analysis, and in that way remove the negative element of ego from our personality. Pure ego is power; impure ego is attraction, binding and confining, and I would even say that “our Father who art in heaven” is also pure ego. God is also pure ego because it has the possibility of creation and the possibility to remain pure.

You mentioned ‘relearning’ in the ashram atmosphere. Is Ramana Maharshi’s ‘unlearning’ and ‘learning’ the same?

We have a certain way of thinking, acting and behaving in society. In that lifestyle there is no awareness of the self. However, in an ashram the idea of the self is generated. You become aware of what you are doing and thinking. You do not act involuntarily, but with awareness, alertness and restraint. The different instructions which are constantly being given throughout the day, either verbally or in written form, make one aware of what one is. This awareness is also a process of learning about a new dimension of oneself, a new area of expression. If you can learn that, you will avoid all the ego problems and head-trips.

I do not think that we actually ‘unlearn’ anything in the ashram, rather, for some time we set aside the normal convictions, concepts and beliefs with which we have been brought up, because they are no longer relevant to the ashram environment. What is relevant in the ashram is awareness, action and faith. These are the three things which must be imbibed from the ashram learning process.

‘Faith’ implies dedication, being true to oneself, and the ability to give and to surrender. ‘Awareness’ implies alertness

about each and every interaction being experienced. 'Action' does not mean sweeping the floor; such mundane actions are only a means to attain something else which is the real action, namely, restraint.

Therefore, a process of continuous learning occurs in the ashram. The 'unlearning' is setting aside what you have known to be true and proper for a particular situation and environment, and applying a different frame of reference during the time that you are here.

How can we apply the rules of the Ganga Darshan ashram to create the best atmosphere in a branch ashram? In a very small ashram with only a few swamis, these rules do not always work.

In a small branch ashram the application of the rules has to change according to the needs and duties of the resident sannyasins. They must decide on this application so that everything needing to be done can be done. At the same time, they must be able to perform their own sadhana, and follow the disciplines which are conducive and helpful to their growth.

I have lived in small branch ashrams and I think that certain basic disciplines can and should be followed by everybody, such as participating in mouna at mealtimes and, of course with exemptions, at work. If there is a telephone call while you are eating, of course you have to answer it. However, as a general practice you should maintain a certain structured discipline.

Another good discipline for a small ashram is to gather together every morning before breakfast for morning prayers. A common morning sadhana can be performed by everyone, which will help to build up the atmosphere of the ashram. Until morning prayers and the morning sadhana are completed, no one should break the discipline of mouna. After breakfast, you can start the normal daily routine of talking and interacting, but before that, maintain your inner awareness and identity.

Of course, discipline will have to be carefully considered as per the requirements of the changing situation, and dealt with accordingly. However, I feel that it is important for people to be very aware of their own interactions and experiences, rather than just of an external system of discipline. An external system is only a support or basis. The actual experience is to be had by each individual, with awareness. For example, avoid unnecessary discussions about petty matters, about who is to do what, as this disturbs the peace of everyone. Remain faithful to yourself, this is more important!

In what way are sannyasins useful to society? Are they not a burden on society and the country and irresponsible towards their parents and society, excluding the Bihar School of Yoga? Secondly, why does one take sannyasa? Is it not possible to attain self-realization while living in society?

In what way are sannyasins useful to society and the country? In no way! They are not useful to society nor are they useful to the country because they lack a very basic item in life: self-regulation, self-discipline. Nobody has this, even in our group of sannyasins, Indian and western both. Nobody is really trying or making any effort towards self-discipline or self-regulation. Nobody!

One example is the notice board. There is a small notice, 'Call to Duty' which has been put there for the residents and swamis to follow as part of their effort towards self-regulation and self-discipline. Now it is only a paper adorning the wall. Nobody follows it. Very few people attend the classes and there are many other instances of slackness. There has to be some type of basic approach, some form of effort or action that will help one to regulate and discipline oneself in the course of time. We can definitely adopt alternative methods for this and become perfect in one method. We have to learn and observe and realize what can happen by following a particular method.

Sannyasins cannot contribute anything unless they get their act, show and life together and decide the purpose and reason for which they have taken up sannyasa. I am sure that without some kind of inspiration, you would not be here. The purpose has to be threefold: a commitment to God, to guru and to humanity. The guru channels this in the form of a mission, lifestyle, discipline and inspiration. The guru's mission flows towards humanity. It is the current that is flowing from God to guru to humanity, and the sannyasins must be in between, like the captain of a boat. A sannyasin has to be the captain of a boat, and this can only happen if the sannyasins learn to regulate and discipline themselves, otherwise everyone is wasting their time.

I am sure that many people take sannyasa with hopes and desires for eventual self-realization; that thought is there in the background. Another factor is linking, identifying and being one with a common cause, whether personal, institutional, spiritual or purely physical, such as a wish to be near the guru.

There is also another factor. Sannyasa is a particular form of lifestyle. There is a specific way of working, living, thinking, acting and behaving and it is all very clearly specified in the yogic texts. The *Bhagavad Gita*, the Upanishads, every spiritual book, even the Bible and Koran talk about a particular lifestyle which encompasses thinking, acting, behaving, knowing and realizing.

Sadhana which one does to attain self-realization is different from the concept of sannyasa. As sannyasins, our sadhana is yoga. There is a definite path, whether it be kriya yoga, bhakti yoga, raja yoga, dhyana yoga or mantra yoga, something one identifies with and that one is able to implement fully. Sadhana done properly can lead to self-realization if that is your goal, even if you are a *grihastha*, householder. Grihastha is a lifestyle, sannyasa is a lifestyle, sadhana is another lifestyle, and the end result of the sadhana is another.

How can one increase devotion to the guru?

You cannot ever increase your devotion to your guru. If you have to try to increase your devotion, it means you are maintaining your own viewpoint, and not allowing for the merging of your consciousness, mind or nature with that of the guru. This is the process of bhakti. How can we become aware of the process that can lead us to this merger?

The first stage of bhakti is *satsang*, clarification of the mental cobwebs and the last stage is *sayujya*, total identification or merging. In the initial stages of bhakti we try to experience, not generate, bhakti. There is a difference between experiencing and generating. You only experience something which is there, and you generate something which is not there. Experience of bhakti is continuous, constant and unchanging, but in order to have this experience it is necessary to go through a process, and that process has to be learned.

In the second stage, *satsang* becomes a source of guidance and not just a good talk “Oh, he says very nice things!” That is not *satsang*. *Satsang* is actually a form of instruction. I have said many things during *satsang* that you are meant to apply in your daily life. How many of you have applied them? No one, or very few, because for most of you *satsang* means hearing nice words being expressed and comparing them with your ideas and saying, “Yes, very nice.” or “No, very bad.” There is no actual assimilation or absorption of the *satsang*.

When *satsang* becomes a process of absorption, then it is slowly applied in one’s daily life, naturally and spontaneously, and in the course of time it transforms one’s life. *Satsang* is not only hearing, it is also following, and living, the instructions that are given. It is a formal class, not a chit-chat class, but everybody flunks this class because they think it is just a chit-chat time.

One must also understand and imbibe the spirit of *sadhana*. The spirit of *sadhana* is not only mental and meditative, but also external, related to actions, behaviour

and ego. Therefore, in bhakti, the word 'yoga' has been added; *yoga* meaning process, realization, a process which leads to the realization of bhakti or devotion. Once this process becomes an active part of our life, the object of identification manifests, in the form of the guru, of a personal or impersonal figure or transcendental symbol.

In the course of time, a merger takes place which is known as mukti, sayujya, moksha, anything that you may want to call it. So, please remember, each one of you, that just as you want to learn asana, pranayama, mudra, bandha, shatkarma, kriya yoga and kundalini yoga in a class for your emancipation and development, in the same way, you should have the mentality, strength and courage to follow the instructions that are given at the time of satsang.

What does karma yoga mean? If it is service to humanity without personal interest, then why do we not do karma yoga in society to eradicate all the evil persons and practices which are creating tension and stopping the growth of society?

Karma yoga does not mean service to others without personal interest. That is a misconception about karma yoga. Neither is karma yoga a yoga in which you involve yourself physically and which becomes your life. Karma yoga is definitely not service, but in order to experience and know karma yoga, one has to adopt the path of service; the service can only become without motive when it is dedicated to a higher concept than the normal human concepts. This concept is channelled in three directions; first in the direction of God, second in the direction of guru, and third in the direction of humanity.

Normally, along with every action we perform, there is an expectation that something nice, good, pleasant or beautiful will happen to us. When this expectation is not met it leads to a drop in mental faculties and a lack of creativity and rationality. There is always a reaction to the result of any action and we are affected by that continuously

in our intellectual, emotional, marital, social, personal, and sannyasa life.

The actual meaning of karma yoga is developing immunity from actions and reactions and the desire for their fruit. Yoga recognizes that as long as we live in this world, in this body, we are bound by the laws that govern our mind and senses. We cannot stop the functions of our senses. If our eyes see something, the mind is bound to react to it either considering it to be pleasant or unpleasant, ugly or beautiful. There is bound to be a like or dislike associated with it. One cannot remain aloof from or undisturbed by the actions of the senses, their perceptions and the mind. This is the constant, continuous activity of the karmendriyas, jnanendriyas and mahat. Mahat is a state in which manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara are all contained.

Thus, karma yoga is developing immunity to the fruits of actions, and in order to develop karma yoga it is necessary to dedicate oneself to the path of service which is not personal or self-oriented, but universal and outgoing. Only then can one truly practise karma yoga.

In general, people do not know how to practise karma yoga in society. Doing good work, being a good Samaritan, being a very pious and virtuous or humble and helping person, although being good qualities, do not express the meaning of karma yoga, because there has to be immunity to actions and their fruit. In order to know karma yoga in its real sense, it is necessary to spend a definite length of time in an ashram, one to ten years, or as long as you can, until you become mature. In the ashram, through continuous and constant effort, one can become immune and can then experience karma yoga in society.

What is it that motivated you to total renunciation?

I do not really know! Actually, to be very frank and truthful, I do not really understand the meaning of renunciation; rather, I feel it is an attainment. Sometimes we become too obsessed with the idea of leaving something behind or

renouncing it. I feel, however, that life is like climbing a ladder; unless the first foot gets a support, the other one does not leave its hold.

Spiritual life is not so much renunciation as attainment, and in the process of attainment, many things are left behind naturally and spontaneously. It is just like being in school. You move from one class to the next, you have attained something and you also leave something behind that has now become unnecessary or irrelevant for you. So, first we attain and then we leave the unnecessary thing behind.

I do not think there is anything that has motivated me to total renunciation. If anything has motivated me it is the wish to attain and not to renounce. I only renounced my clothes, and changed from civil dress to *geru*, but I do not think I have renounced my family. I might have left a family of four, but I have become stuck now with a family of hundreds! I might have left signing the income tax forms of that family, but I have to do the same thing here in the ashram. I would say that, as a *sannyasin*, I have adopted an attitude to do my best to help people according to my ability. This is the only difference that has occurred by forgetting everything that I called my own.

If we can somehow manage our attachment so that it does not limit our efforts and abilities, then this is the right way to go about life. People have attachments for so many little things that it becomes very difficult to get rid of that feeling. I have no feeling of ‘mine-ness’; rather I feel that everything belongs to a mission for the fulfilment of a vision, and I am just a part of that, just a wave on the ocean. If the wave begins to think, “I am the ocean”, then there will be problems!

How does one develop an open heart and mind?

By developing *viveka*, discernment and *vairagya*, non-attachment; because having an open mind is *viveka* and having an open heart is *vairagya*. The faculties of the mind and heart are twofold; one is positive and the other

is negative. One is sublime and the other is mundane or being caught up in our desires, ambitions and samskaras. Getting caught up in our own web of desire and emotion is negative, because it limits the full expression or potential of the personality.

In order to have an open heart, the first thing to do is to free oneself from self-generated passions. Passion reflects our aspirations and desires in relation to the external world; this leads to attachment to the fruits or results we hope to receive from our actions. If we can free ourselves from these self-generated passions, then we will experience non-attachment.

When we are able to experience non-attachment, then new feelings will be generated which will be more universal and transcendental in nature. They are not confined to oneself alone, but express themselves equally in every aspect of the manifest dimension. Non-attachment or vairagya is necessary in order to have an open and all-expansive heart.

The second aspect for opening the mind is viveka. Viveka is not rationality; it is not even having a good store of knowledge. It is the process by which knowledge can be differentiated from non-knowledge; 'right' can be differentiated from 'wrong'. This aspect is also developed when there is acceptance of life and not struggle against it. The struggle occurs at a personal and social level and affects the entire human structure.

The search for fulfilment and satisfaction, which is the main drive of every human being, tends to be compartmentalized by the intellect, and this compartmentalization eventually leads to obsession. When clarity of mind is absent, obsession is experienced. Then mental tension and conflict begin, leading to limitation of the mental faculties. Limitation of the mental faculties is experienced externally as fear, insecurity, anger and frustration which become the normal experience of our daily life. However, along with mental clarity, acceptance of life and dharma, viveka is attained.

Dharma is not a lifestyle, nor is it a philosophy or theory of life. It is a practical understanding of where our duties lie, as an individual belonging to a society, as a human being inhabiting this planet and as an individual unit of the cosmic identity.

It is a very hard path to develop an open heart and mind, so do not try it! Instead, be more realistic about life and more aware of what you do. Once you are able to accept yourself and your life, maybe you will learn to adjust yourself also. Self-adjustment is one of the greatest qualities which one can aspire for.

Can you explain the tradition of aushadhi and how it is used today?

Aushadhi is a complete branch of healing which deals with the science of herbs. This science evolved in times similar to the Vedas, when nature was recognized as the greatest healer of human sickness. All of nature was seen as having shakti, the power to cure and rebalance the entire physical system.

There were different classifications of herbs. *Aushadhi* looks at the entire vegetable kingdom, including trees, herbs, flowers, barks, roots and fruits. Different combinations of these produce different results and effects. In the course of their discovery, the yogis also found certain herbs which could expand the limits of awareness and consciousness. Hence, there are two categories of herbs; one which provides health and the other which brings about an altered state of mind or consciousness.

The herbs with healing effects became a well-known and accepted part of the medicinal system of that time. Knowledge of the herbs which induce an altered state of mind remained confined to a few, as it was found that common usage of such herbs was not properly handled by the average individual. Incorrect assimilation of the herbs created a psychedelic effect, bringing out the passions and the tamasic, rajasic and sattwic states. Due to this, the user of the herbal drug could not channel the forces generated at the time of an altered state, and so could not actually gain

anything from the experience. Then, with the advent of chemical drugs for health and also for altering the mind, we lost touch with their herbal counterparts.

From a yogic perspective, aushadhi is a force which is used in the evolution of the human personality. Its use leads to a natural and sattwic way of life, a lifestyle which is in harmony with the composition of the human body, brain, mind and universe.

The knowledge of aushadhi is recommended for bringing about the purity of body, mind and spirit. When the body, mind and spirit are pure, human evolution progresses at a much faster pace. Herbs which are used both as medicines and as mind-altering agents must also be used as part of a sadhana; there is no becoming habituated to the herbs, you use them consciously. We become habituated very fast to any kind of drug or medicine. Every time we have a headache, we search for an aspirin and thereby block ourselves to an alternative way of healing that headache. This process of habituation limits the creativity and sensitivity of the mind. Our life is then governed by this limited expression of our personality.

In terms of healing, yoga says, “Build up the stamina and the resistance of the body so that it can carry out its own healing process.” The healing power within the body should be raised to a higher level with the help of herbs so that it does not need any external chemical change, because the misuse of drugs tends to alter the natural biorhythm of the body. Therefore, for a yogi, the maximum use of herbs is recommended, provided there is knowledge and understanding of them.

Please explain about the gods Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. I was told that my ishta is Vishnu, but I have not been able to love him as my ishta. I love the *Vishnu Sahasranam* because I take it as the Supreme God’s name and not as that Vishnu who does funny things like taking Shivalingams from Ravana as per mythology.

Let us begin with the concept of God and gods in the singular and plural. The word 'god' in Sanskrit is *deva*. In English, *deva* and *dev* mean 'illuminated being', or 'self-effulgent being'. According to Indian thought there are many, many gods that represent the effulgent spirit contained in the different objects, very much like Zeus, Athena, Apollo, etc., of the ancient Greeks. There is a great similarity between the description of Greek and Indian gods. Zeus represents the god of thunder in Greek mythology and is the king of the gods. Indra is also the god of thunder and the king of the gods according to Indian mythology. Apollo, Athena and other Greek gods have similarities with gods of Indian myth. They represent the effulgent nature of the spirit in every part of creation, whether it be thunder, stone, trees, mountains, human beings, and so on and so forth.

However, beyond these minor gods, or devas, there is one supreme reality known as *Ishwara*, the undecaying principal or transcendental, unchanging reality. This unchanging reality has three aspects in the manifest dimension. The aspect of omniscience is represented by the concept of Brahma, the creator. The aspect of omnipresence is represented by the image of Vishnu, the energy which is present in everything as the sustaining force. The aspect of omnipotent energy, power and strength is symbolized by Shiva and it is his responsibility to use his power in order to bring about a change, or transformation in the existing structure of life.

Mythologically, there are many different stories, but one should not concern oneself with the mythological images, because we do not even know whether they actually happened or not. It is so far back in the remote past that we do not know if it is reality or fantasy, but one thing we have to understand is the concept of the trinity, which exists even in Christianity as Father, Son and the Holy Ghost.

The concept of the trinity is also found in the Indian system in the form of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. If you

compare the Christian trinity with the Indian trinity you will find similarities. For example, the concept of God the Father. Let us not see it from the point of view of the Supreme God, but as the quality which a father represents. Who is the father? The creator. And who is the creator? Brahma. Who is the son? Creation. And what is creation? Continuity, maintenance. So the Son can be compared to Vishnu. And the Holy Spirit? (I will not make jokes about him but, very fondly, I call him smoky.) The Holy Spirit can be compared to Shiva, because it is always in the background, the force that works upon beings, conditions and situations in order to bring about a change, a transformation. Therefore, even in this superficial comparison, the two trinities of Father, Son and the Holy Ghost, and Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva can be considered as the same, or at least similar, in quality and manifestation.

The concept of God also conveys the same thing, G-O-D: Generation, representing Brahman; Organization, representing Vishnu; and Destruction, representing Shiva. Generation is the power of omniscience; organization is the power of omnipresence and destruction is the power of omnipotence. If you go to the root of the various concepts, you will find that they all have the same beginning, middle and end. It is only our interpretation which alters the concept. If your ishta is Vishnu then you should identify, not with the mythological image of Vishnu, but with the energy, strength and quality that Vishnu represents. If you identify with Shiva, then you should understand Shiva in terms of the qualities which Shiva represents, and similarly with Brahma.

There are two aspects of divine consciousness, *sakara*, or the manifest form, and *nirakara*, or the unmanifest form. If you identify with name, form and quality, that is the manifest connection. Indians have been very free in their connection with the divine. When India became free from the British Raj, the population was 330,000,000 and the number of gods was also 330,000,000. Today we are at 850,000,000. This

means that everyone is free to identify with a quality, attribute and form representing divinity for them. Those people who believed in different manifestations and incarnations of Vishnu came to be known as Vaishnavas. Those who believed in different manifestations and incarnations of Shiva came to be known as the Shaivas. Those who identified with different manifestations of Shakti, the feminine force or power, became known as Shaktas.

This broad labelling and categorization happened much later on, but initially in our system, everyone was free to evolve their own understanding and concept of divinity and people have expressed that nature in different ways. Later, these different expressions or experiences became stories, descriptions and part of mythology. I am not saying that mythology is totally useless and baseless. It definitely has historical value. Many events in the life of Sri Rama, Sri Krishna and Lord Buddha show them to have possessed divine qualities lacking in ordinary individuals. They were elevated to the level of godhood, and they were gods just as much as we are also part of the same force and reality, but are not aware of it. The moment we realize our true nature we will also attain the same status.

If you identify with the sakara aspect of ishta, an image with quality, form and name, you should see the quality which the image represents. If you identify with nirakara, then please remember that for this path a different type of person is needed. In order to experience the nirakara state one has to have a different nature, mind and calibre. Very few people can realize Ishwara, the nirakara, the unmanifest, but many can associate themselves with the sakara, the manifest.

You have mentioned that you do not like Vishnu but you do like *Vishnu Sahasranam*. You do not like Vishnu because you do not like the image of Vishnu who plays all kinds of tricks with people. Fine, do not identify with that image. But you have also said that you like *Vishnu Sahasranam* because it represents different qualities of divinity, so you are identifying with the nature or quality of Vishnu, and that is good enough.

Let that be the ishta, and when you have the image of Vishnu see his quality and not his antics and tricks.

**How can swara yoga practices help us to know God better?
How can any practice or action help us to know God better?**

Do not ask me questions about God. I do not have any experience of God, and neither have I seen anyone experiencing God, and those who have had the experience are not able to express it. We all have our own concept of God. For many, God may be an image or symbol. For others He may be an historical or mythological figure or only a concept.

If God is a concept of something nice, positive, pure, creative and transcendental, then not only every practice of yoga but every action and thought in life will lead you to that experience. Through an expanded consciousness you will begin to experience the purity, simplicity and expansive nature of yourself. The moment you do that, God will present Himself. If God is a person, whether in the form of Buddha, Rama, Christ, Krishna or any other avatara, whether historical or mythical, then according to the inclination and programming of your mind, different practices will lead you to an explosion of the inner experience.

There are people who were atheists in their early life, who never believed in Christ, but after a few years of yoga practice, have become Born-Again Christians. Why? They have an experience which changes their mind and belief completely. I am not saying Born-Again Christians in a negative sense, but in a very nice and positive sense. People have told me, "Swamiji, I do my mantra *Om Namah Shivaya* and I get the vision of Christ. Is it wrong?" I say, "No, it is not wrong, you are expressing a symbol which is embedded deep in your consciousness and the mantra is helping you to bring that image out, to experience it!" Afterwards they tell me "Swamiji, I am grateful to yoga because now I can understand the teachings of Christ. Thank you very much!" I say, "Welcome!" and that is the end of it.

Each one of us experiences God in our own way. There is no fixed way leading to God. Are there highways in the sky? No! You can go anywhere, the sky is the limit! In the same way, there are no defined highways to God. People say that a particular system exists or that their way is the only way, but if God is an omnipresent reality, then there is no system which can be the only way to God. If one system becomes the only way then God is not omnipresent. If God is the omnipotent reality then every action and thought can bring one closer to God.

Potency of thought and action also exists in every individual. Thoughts are powerful. If I think badly about you, you will definitely pick it up, maybe not consciously but unconsciously. If I think well of you, you will pick it up in the same way. If I think badly about you, after a few days you will begin to avoid me for no rhyme or reason. That is what happens. Has it not happened to you? If you think well of somebody, even if they are a stranger, they will click with you.

Even thoughts, feelings and emotions can lead to God-experience. If you use an image or symbol it will bring the image that you cherish closest to your heart to the surface of your mind, according to your conditioning. Therefore, it is not a question of which practice of yoga can make you aware of God. Experience of God is a personal matter, and God is experienced when bhakti awakens inside. Bhakti is fine-tuning. It is not devotion. Devotion may be the outer face of bhakti but only when you are able to fine-tune yourself will you experience God.

There are three areas in which human beings express themselves unconsciously. The first is knowledge, expressed unconsciously in a conditioned, defined and set way. The second area is karma or action, which is also expressed in a conditioned, defined and set way. The third area is bhakti or faith, which again expresses itself in a set way. All three are unconscious. A yogi is one in whose life these three manifest in an effortless and conscious way.

Visionaries create an environment where people are taught the path of jnana, karma and bhakti. Christ taught the path of jnana, karma and bhakti. Buddha taught the path of jnana, karma and bhakti. We do not even have to look so far back in history; we can just see what Sri Swamiji is doing. He is teaching us the path of jnana through yoga. Pratyahara, dharana, kriya yoga or nada yoga are practices to make us aware of ourselves. Through such practices, we come to know how our personality behaves and acts, how we react, and how we can achieve balance. This is *jnana*, applied, not intellectual knowledge. Sri Swamiji is also teaching us the path of karma yoga through seva. Service, love and compassion for other people – help them out, be available, that is the path of action through seva. In his own life he is experiencing bhakti. Two thousand years later we will be saying that Swami Satyananda taught the path of jnana, karma and bhakti.

It is the destiny and path of a human being to walk on the path of jnana, karma and bhakti. We all walk differently and express these in our own way at different times. When we begin to apply knowledge, action, and faith, then we become complete human beings and God-realization takes place. Whether it is through the methods of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Vaishnavism, Shaivism or Shaktism, we are being taught how to live knowledge, action and faith. Whatever our social and political interpretation of a system may be, the main thrust and direction concerns actualization of these three things.

I am a married person leading a happy and normal married life. Now that I have introduced kriya yoga into my life should I become celibate in order to get the full benefit of the practices? Should I encourage my partner to learn kriya yoga also?

Why have you chosen celibacy? Why not practise something else like *ahimsa*, non-violence; *satya*, truth; or *aparigraha*, non-accumulation? Why only bhramacharya? Is it because

celibacy is one of the yamas and niyamas? No, it is not necessary to become a celibate to get benefit from kriya yoga. What you are referring to by the word *bhramacharya*, or celibacy, is sensual abstinence, but in the practice of kriya yoga sensual abstinence is not necessary. You are free to lead a normal, happy, married life. At the same time, you should make a commitment to yourself to practise kriya yoga without conflict concerning your goals and aspirations. You will find that the best benefits of kriya yoga can be derived by leading a natural life.

If you alter your life in any way, then you have to combine all five yama and niyama, and not choose only one or two which you think are most applicable to you. If you can live your life according to the yamas and niyamas, then so much the better. It is all or nothing. And one more thing. The moment you start feeling the benefits of kriya yoga, and transformation begins to take place in your field of consciousness, you will experience many unnecessary things in life being spontaneously left behind. This happens in yoga, too. There comes a time when we derive no enjoyment from things we liked doing before. It seems that we outgrow them.

If sensuality is not a problem, then you will find that it complements your kriya practice. Therefore, just concentrate on your practice and allow the changes and adjustments to occur gradually. I am sure you will be happy with the outcome of the adjustments between the spiritual and physical lifestyle.

It is a good idea to encourage your partner to learn kriya yoga. If the members of a family share the same goal, lifestyle, feelings and aspirations, then there will be mutual support, encouragement, affection and love which also assists the unfoldment of energy and consciousness, but please do this gradually and slowly. Introduce your partner to the practices and concepts of yoga first and then gradually introduce kriya yoga.

Could you give us some advice about how to maintain our sadhana while leading a western lifestyle, which is so busy and full of duty?

Consider your sadhana to be another duty and you will definitely be able to incorporate it into your busy lifestyle. Just as you consider that you have duties, commitments and obligations to fulfil, make your sadhana a duty for which you have to find time. I would advise you in general to practise half an hour of physical sadhana in the morning, combining the practice of a few asanas, pranayama, mudra, bandha and kriyas. If you are a healthy person then a few practices are enough. If you are sick then you have to practise according to the program given to you in order to overcome the illness.

If you are healthy, a few rounds of surya namaskara involving forward and backward movement of the body; a few rounds of tadasana involving traction of the body; a few rounds of tiryaka tadasana involving a lateral stretch of the body; a few rounds of kati chakrasana involving twisting and squeezing of the body, and a few rounds of one inverted posture are sufficient. If possible do *sirshasana*, the headstand, but please remember that it is only for healthy people. It is not for people with weak necks, lumbar aches and pains, hypertension or those who use broncho-dilators. A person who has not taken medicine in the last two or three years and for whom everything is absolutely normal can practise this sadhana.

After the inverted posture, do one vitalizing pranayama like bhastrika, kapalbhathi or surya bheda, one tranquillizing pranayama like bhramari or ujjayi, and one balancing pranayama like nadi shodhana. After that, in order to stimulate the internal organs and ensure that they are healthy and strong, practise agnisara kriya and then maybe a couple of rounds of kriya practice. This should be the morning program.

In the evening, before going to sleep, practise a few minutes of trataka, a few minutes of antar mouna, and a few minutes of ajapa japa, as one meditation practice. Then

stretch out, start practising yoga nidra and go to sleep. Sleep in yoga nidra and you will find that this half-hour in the morning and half hour at night is the best form of sadhana for people who have no time to spare.

From time to time, every year, make it a point to visit an ashram for seven to fifteen days for a change of environment. Just as you send your car to a garage for servicing, you should send yourself to an ashram for recharging.

Is it possible to take on the karma of another person?

We do not really know what it is, but something is definitely taken on, and that which we take on, whether we do it emotionally or intellectually, knowingly or unknowingly is a kind of karma by itself.

I do not actually know what karma is, although I have attempted many times to give you an answer. I see the passage through karmas as a process of natural evolution. Just as the wind can carry the perfume of a flower or of putrid flesh for great distances before the air becomes pure again, when the human consciousness comes in contact with a particular influence, it carries this karma for some time until the pure nature of consciousness shines again. Our consciousness is thus a khichari of karmas, and we cannot differentiate one from another. In this impure state of mind it is not possible to know what karma is.

In order to understand karma, one has to be like the cook who collects all the items together, knowing their properties and qualities before putting them in the pot. The cook is the *drashta*, seer, or *sakshi*, witness, referred to in the *Yoga Sutras*. This witness or seer becomes established in its own nature through the practice of yoga. When that observing or witnessing awareness has evolved, the karmas can be observed and their interplay within the human personality can be seen. They can then be altered and transcended.

Therefore, yes, one does carry the karma of another person, and at the same time it is possible that by becoming adept in the practice of yoga, one can go beyond the realm of karma.

Why do the swamis here apply three lines of bhasma on their foreheads?

Before 1990 we did not apply anything on our foreheads, but in 1990 when Sri Swamiji established Paramahansa Alakh Bara, the swamis who were trained in the sannyasa course, and who adopted the sannyasa lifestyle in India, were given the three lines. These three lines represent the three gunas – sattwa, rajas, and tamas. Application of bhasma is possible in an ashram environment. It is not possible to use bhasma when you are elsewhere because people do not understand it, but in India they do understand because of their cultural and spiritual awareness.

A jignasu sannyasin applies one line, representing their effort to overcome their tamasic nature. A karma sannyasin applies two lines, representing their effort to overcome their tamasic and rajasic nature. A poorna sannyasin applies three lines, representing their effort to overcome all three gunas.

Bhasma, or ash, is symbolic of the essence of everything. If we burn this body, what remains? Ash. If the entire building is burnt down, what remains? Ash. Ash is the essence of the tattwas or elements, and the realization of these can take us beyond the influence of our tamasic, rajasic and sattwic nature. Thus, the lines are symbolic. They keep us aware of our aim and direction. The red dot which is placed beneath the lines, between the eyebrows, represents the power of shakti. It is the support, the help, of shakti that allows a sadhaka to overcome the three gunas which are the attributes of manifest nature.

Can you please talk about how to balance humility with awareness of one's strengths?

This can be achieved by identifying with the humility within you and not with the strengths, while at the same time, using the strengths as a natural expression of your creative ability to help yourself and others. It is a question of identification. If we identify with our strengths, we are going to feel proud, experience ego, and develop a feeling of superiority. Then the

downfall of the mind will begin in the sense that it will identify more with power, with the knowledge that 'I can do this and do that', and this sense of 'I can' will boost up the self-image in a tamastic, rather than sattwic, way. If you can identify with the simplicity, sincerity and humility within you and try to do what is best, you will be using your strengths naturally and spontaneously without altering your mental state.

Please speak to us a little bit about faith. What is the difference between faith and belief? Is faith something that can be engendered or is it something which we are born with? If one has lost faith through disillusionment, can it be restored?

Belief is mind speech. Faith is heart speech. If you can lose faith easily due to disillusionment it means that you never had it. Let us try to understand this in a different way. Belief can often be construed as faith. Why? It is because in our understanding, belief means acceptance with adherence, placing our trust in what we have accepted. However, in faith there is trust, surrender and acceptance, not adherence. In belief it is not necessary to have the feeling of surrender. Adherence can often become a way of surrender. I have been following this for so many years in my own life that I feel I have surrendered myself.

Belief can be broken, but faith cannot be broken. If faith is broken, this means it was only a head-trip without any real inner surrender. Surrender to whom? You have to surrender to yourself; to your feelings and convictions. We never surrender to another person. You might say that you have surrendered to Sri Swamiji and accepted him as your guru, but tell me, how many times in your life have you seen him, and how many times has he guided you personally? You might have seen him three, four, five times in a lecture environment. How does that become surrender? It is not surrender, it is belief. An encounter like that changes into belief, but surrender happens when there is trust and belief in oneself. Even if the guru is miles away, but you identify with

him in spirit, mind, behaviour, action and wisdom, then I can say “Yes, you have been able to surrender.” But have you ever experienced the wisdom of guru within you? No. Therefore it cannot be surrender.

Belief and surrender are very interesting concepts. I can believe that Swami ‘X’ is a very nice person, containing all the wisdom of the ages. I may feel that this person can guide me, be my refuge. I feel a great energy field around that person in the form of love, compassion and knowledge. That is my link with this swami whom I have accepted as my guru, but it is only a belief, it is not faith. It is a belief that I have created in order to give myself a direction in which to move.

Now, it may happen that somebody comes and says to you “Swami ‘X’ is a very bad person, look what has happened because of him” and suddenly you say, “Right, that Swami ‘X’ must be a bad person”, and your belief is gone! You say, “My faith is shattered!” How can faith shatter? It was only a belief which shattered, and it did not shatter because of your personal experience, but because you are susceptible to the influence of other people. We have to be very clear in our minds. If we have accepted somebody, something or some idea as our focal point, then there has to be a feeling of unity with which a third person cannot interfere. If unity exists, then faith manifests. If unity does not exist, it is only a heady concept, a belief, a thought, that can be shattered at any time.

Belief can change, but faith can never change. Faith is awareness of the quality which is good within me, the other person and everyone. It is communicating at that level where we are able to experience equality. And belief? There is smoke in the mountains. Seeing the smoke we believe there is a fire, but when we go to see what is happening, we find that there is no smoke and no fire. Originally, we believed there was a fire and we called the fire brigade and everyone came. Later on we discovered it was only a wisp of cloud which, from a distance, looked like fire. Thus, belief changes, and belief and faith are matters of individual discovery. This

discovery can only happen if one is sincere with oneself. Therefore, be sincere with yourself.

How do we differentiate between a need and a desire?

It is important to use our common sense in deciding what our needs and desires are, because many times desires take the form of needs and needs become desires. To differentiate between the two is not that easy. If you are following the process of pratyahara, dharana and jnana yoga, in the course of time, you will know the difference between desire and need. I cannot explain it because every individual has a different level of perception, evolution, and karmic expression, and also of cultural and social input. We are influenced by the three gunas – sattwa, rajas and tamas – and because of our condition we need to adopt a process of observation and analysis.

This process has been very clearly defined in the systems of pratyahara and dharana, and just to give you a broad outline of how pratyahara, dharana and jnana yoga look at the different components, I will describe the SWAN theory to you. SWAN stands for strength, weakness, ambition and need. We have many strengths and weaknesses. Lack of will, uncertainty, loss of self-image, inferiority complex, and the inability to relate to other people with confidence are different forms of weakness. Some examples of strength are the creative ability to relate to other people and society, to relate to an individual, and to the cosmos.

Then, just as we have to deal with our strengths and weaknesses, we also have to deal with our ambitions and needs. I do not agree that we have to abstain from fulfilling our ambitions. Ambitions definitely need to be fulfilled, but you have to determine which ambitions are sattwic and conducive to your growth, and which ambitions are rajasic. There are many things that you can do without and many things that you need to work for. Ambitions that are tamasic, limiting and detrimental, which create confusion and self-centred awareness, and which boost the ego or pride should

be avoided. We need to be able to differentiate between positive and negative sattwic, rajasic and tamasic ambitions. How do we develop this discriminative ability? Pratyahara is the answer.

The same thing applies to need. The body has certain needs, like food and drink. We cannot live without sensory stimulation for any length of time. There are emotional needs such as support and encouragement. We cannot live without them for long, but we can definitely try to find a balance in our emotional, intellectual, sensorial, sensual and social needs. If we have a family, we need to fulfil certain obligations and commitments like educating our children. These needs are not ambitions but the necessities of life; although I may have a car, I do not need the latest Rolls Royce. My need is a car; my ambition is a Rolls Royce. Therefore, one has to have a very practical and pragmatic approach in determining what one actually needs and what one can do without.

In pratyahara we begin to observe ourselves and to analyze the different expressions of our nature and mind. We begin to strike a balance between the manifestation of our internal and external ambitions, needs, behaviour and attitudes. We can then understand the positive, creative, constructive ambitions and needs, and separate them from the fantasy ones. Therefore, you will have to seriously practise observing the mind-field and looking at your lifestyle. Decide what is the most positive, creative and constructive way to make your life a balanced and happy one.

We are from Sydney and are considering setting up a foundation to investigate and codify kundalini. We believe that people in the West would benefit from a greater understanding of kundalini awakening. For example, many young people diagnosed as having mental disorders such as schizophrenia may well be experiencing kundalini awakening. As my colleagues in the medical profession have little or no understanding of this phenomenon,

these people are put on harmful drugs and admitted to institutions. Could you please tell us what you think of this situation and give us any suggestions that may help us in our endeavour?

I can fully appreciate and identify with what you are trying to do, but first I will share my feelings with you. There are many people in the world who have had partial awakening of kundalini, and who have suffered because they have not been able to handle the experience and were not even aware of what happened. The only system available to us at present for dealing with psychological problems is modern psychotherapy.

What we are trying to do in our yoga university is to establish a system of effective yoga psychotherapy that will enable us to understand psychic disturbances. Just by looking at a person I can tell whether they have a psychic disturbance or schizophrenia, but so far we do not have the skills available in the world to identify kundalini crack-ups. Therefore, it would definitely be advisable to set up your foundation, and we will support you in this project. At the same time, I would advise you to educate yourself in yogic psychology and psychotherapy. We should know how far the modern concept of psychotherapy can take us and how the yogic concept of psychotherapy can go beyond that. I think there can be a good interaction between the two institutes.

In the initial stage, you should start gathering data from people experiencing some form of mental imbalance and make a psychological profile of every individual through a series of questionnaires. Include their history, how much mental and emotional family history is involved, what their dreams and visions are and then consider how much of it is psychic. Then it will be easier to follow a specific direction.

My main concern is to understand where exactly these people are psychologically and psychically, not just to introduce another form of yogic treatment for every case that comes down the road. The modern system gives medicines, tranquillizers and drugs, but we have to go one step beyond

that. It may take five or six years, but let us do it properly, because this is definitely a need of the future.

What is tapasya?

Even satsang is tapasya. *Tapasya* has been translated as austerity, but it means a process of developing purity of thought, word and deed. Through satsang it is possible to develop purity of thought. Through practice it is possible to develop purity of action and that is tapasya. Tapasya does not necessarily mean hard toil. Tapasya means a process of transformation. The panchagni which Sri Swamiji is doing in Rikhia is another form of tapasya.

There are different grades of tapasya as there are different grades of mouna. These different grades of sadhana correspond to the different calibres of mind. For somebody whose mind is not balanced, normal karma yoga can be very hard tapasya, whereas for somebody like Sri Swamiji whose mind is very balanced, panchagni is not even a tapasya that he considers to be very difficult. So there are different grades of sadhana according to the preponderance of the gunas. For a tamasic person, even sitting here quietly for half an hour is hard tapasya. They will say, "What the hell am I doing here? I don't want to be here. I want to be out enjoying my life." while for a sattwic person, panchagni is not tapasya; it is a very simple and natural process.

I feel there is a difference between the eastern and western idea of the guru-disciple relationship. For the easterner it is a part of the spiritual tradition, but for the westerner the guru is a much respected person. Can you comment on this?

The guru-disciple relationship has been clearly described in the *Light on the Guru-Disciple Relationship*, published by Yoga Publications Trust. One thing which you must understand is that the guru tradition is definitely an eastern one. In the relationship between guru and disciple, one point is emphasized: the feeling of union between disciple and

guru. This is the most important point of the guru-disciple relationship, the feeling of union. This feeling of union is not just an intellectual or emotional concept; it goes much deeper than either mind or heart. It is the link that exists between two spirits, and in order to have this clear link, one needs to go beyond the expressions of ego and attain inner peace or inner realization. Only then can the undivided link with the guru be experienced.

In the western tradition there has been some kind of understanding of the guru-disciple relationship but not in the same way as in eastern thought. The western tradition has emphasized a more formal teaching relationship. In this teaching relationship, people can maintain their dualistic attitudes and concepts. So the western guru-disciple relationship has maintained a dualistic approach of respect, learning and teaching, whereas in the eastern system the guru-disciple relationship represents deeper, inner spiritual unity which can be attained after going beyond the normal ego expressions. Both systems are valid.

You gave me the third-eye as my psychic symbol. How should I visualize it?

Whatever symbol you have, whether it is the third-eye, a candle-flame, a star, a point of light or a yantra, you are supposed to visualize it in *chidakasha*, the space before the closed eyes in the region of the eyebrow centre.

Initially, visualization is a process of the imagination. At first you cannot see anything, but the more you imagine the more focused your mind becomes, until gradually you are able to see the outline of the symbol. In the course of time it will become a very clear, beautiful and colourful three-dimensional image.

The clarity of the symbol depends on your concentration of mind. If the mind is dissipated the symbol will not be clear. If the mind is relaxed, calm, peaceful and focused, the symbol will be clear. The symbol of the third-eye is to be visualized vertically, not horizontally. If you look at the mythological image of Lord Shiva you will see how the third-

eye is depicted. When you have the eyes closed in meditation you are supposed to visualize the open third-eye.

I see people who are dropping some of their attachments but becoming attached to yoga and geru. Is this not just a power trip?

For you it may be, but not for those who are sincerely experiencing it. Out of thousands of people there are many who sincerely experience detachment from worldly things and some who find security in a different environment and lifestyle. There are different kinds of people and you cannot put everyone in the same category.

You have five fingers on each hand, each one different from the other. Although they form part of the same hand, each finger is different. In the same way, the many people who form part of a tradition or group are all different and each accepts the tradition according to his or her understanding and ability to deal with a situation. Therefore, for you it can seem like a power trip, but there are many people who are sincere in their commitment and who do not feel it to be so.

In the Sufi tradition there is a saying that love is of two kinds: *ishk mizazi* which means mental or heady love, and *ishk hakiki* which means transcendental or divine love. Now, as long as your love is heady, you are directing it towards the head, but if you can change the direction of that love it begins to flow towards the heart and the aim becomes different. However, the mind has to adjust and adapt to the change of flow, and this adjustment takes some time. You have to change your conditioning, beliefs, attitude and manner of interaction and come to a point of maturity. In the absence of maturity, even with a change of direction, you will still continue to feel the same limitations of mind even when your love is flowing in the other direction.

Attachments are of two kinds. One is self-centred, oriented towards sensorial and sensual satisfaction, while the other is non self-centred and oriented towards a different cause.

Concerning geru and yoga, it is possible that in the initial stage, while you are growing up spiritually, you may feel attached to these things. You may feel attached to the guru, to yoga, to God, or even to the geru cloth, but in the course of time this attachment changes and becomes a process of self-motivated connection. When we desire something from this connection and our emotions are linked with the result, it takes the form of attachment, but if the emotions, mind and rationality do not have any expectations for the result, then only the connection is experienced and not the attachment.

Therefore, on the positive side, attachment is connection and evolution while on the negative side, it is bondage. It is the role of yoga, and of the geru to make you aware of the connection and not the attachment, but there are very few disciples who understand this process.

What is the role of dharma and bhakti and how can we combine the two?

Dharma is not religion; it is that which is constructive, creative, positive and conducive to our growth. *Bhakti* is the channelling of one's inner expressions and emotions towards an experience of inner harmony. Thus, on the one hand there is a channelling of human faculties with the aim of experiencing inner harmony, bhakti, and on the other hand, an imbibing of those qualities which can give us an understanding of human relationships, dharma. These two should go hand in hand if life is to be lived fully and the goal of life attained.

I do not know what people imagine the goal of life to be, because when I look around, everyone seems to be thinking along one track only: take birth, become educated, get a job, rise high on the ladder of name, fame and status, have a family and educate the children so that they can continue the rat race and die. This is the most prevalent social system in the world today. In this form of life, there is very little scope for fully realizing or expressing either dharma or bhakti.

Yogis have always maintained that dharma is the highest expression and bhakti the highest attainment. As spiritual aspirants, no matter how involved we are in spirituality, whether superficially or deeply, we should try to be aware of the qualities that we can develop and express for the betterment of the family, friends, society and the world. That is dharma.

In this process, we should learn how to channel our mental expressions so that our mental energies are not dissipated and confusion does not occur. Once we learn to do this, we can then ultimately experience purity of heart. When we combine dharma and bhakti, we can experience a natural life, at one with nature and the divine, with the manifest and the transcendental.

Therefore, we should move towards an application and understanding of dharma and bhakti in our life through whatever method or process we can adopt. This is the natural urge in every individual, especially now at the end of the twentieth century when people are feeling a need to express themselves in a different way. If we can combine dharma and bhakti, that is the best way to see a new dawn and find a positive direction in the twenty-first century.

Please speak to us about the meaning and importance of tradition as a general concept, socially, culturally and spiritually. Why does tradition have power and what kind of power does it have?

The Sanskrit word for tradition is *parampara*. *Param* means great and *para* means a vision that has been handed down. Thus, parampara is a great vision which has been carried on from generation to generation. Today there are two kinds of tradition, the social and the spiritual, which exist in many parts of the world including India.

The social tradition is the vision of thinkers who have considered the people's mentality and have formed a code of conduct most suitable for their particular society. In order to create harmony in the social pattern, social traditions are

based very much on the principles of yama. One yama is *ahimsa*, non-violence, as in 'Thou shall not kill or cause injury'. This is also one of the ten commandments of Christianity. Non-violence is a social precept that, when followed over generations, becomes a social tradition. Many such things have been propagated by social thinkers to create social harmony, for example, respect for elders and affection for the young.

Apart from the social tradition, there is the spiritual tradition. Spiritual traditions arise from the visions of people who have experienced something non-material, and who have developed their own futuristic view of the spiritual growth of humanity. Sannyasa is an example of a spiritual tradition. Yoga is a system; sannyasa is a tradition.

In the sannyasa tradition, the two main concepts which one needs to develop and experience are viveka and vairagya. To realize viveka and vairagya, one has to follow a sadhana of self-study, service, surrender and contentment. This is a tradition which aims towards reaching a definite goal. People have been given the freedom to add their own experience to the tradition, according to the needs prevalent today. Originally, in the sannyasa system which evolved in India, due to historical difficulties such as wars and calamities, many restrictions were imposed as to who could or could not follow the path of sannyasa. In the course of time, these became very rigid and strict and many people who did not have the insight or vision to see the actual direction sannyasa was taking, thought that rigidity was part of the tradition.

Swami Sivananda began initiating males, females, foreigners, everyone without any distinction into the tradition of sannyasa. There was a lot of opposition from the so-called 'traditionalists' who had not actually identified with the true vision of sannyasa but only with its rules. They had to face many difficulties because Swami Sivananda was a visionary. He could see what sannyasa could ultimately do for a person if adopted with the right frame of mind. Then his disciples and grand-disciples continued the tradition,

modifying it slightly according to the necessities of society and people's mentality. Tradition always represents the final aim, the pure aim which we have to work towards while simultaneously adjusting to the prevailing global social conditions.

In the context of Indian history, even the social traditions have gone through many changes, and each change has been recorded in the form of *smritis*. One well-known *smriti* is *Manu Smriti*, which every law student has to read. It is considered to be the most ancient code of civilian life. After Manu, many different thinkers contributed their ideas as to how society could evolve harmoniously according to the times and prevailing conditions. Their ideas became part of the *smritis*. In the West, similar things have happened. Many great thinkers have prescribed codes of conduct according to the needs of the time, but we have not yet been able to assimilate those ideas due to our lack of understanding; we have rejected many of the values saying that they have no relevance or meaning in our life.

The aim of the social tradition is fourfold: First, financial, marital and emotional security, both external and internal. In order to attain this aim it is necessary to be aware of the interactions between people, to understand and be sensitive to their needs, so there is no suppression or repression of any kind. The second aim is the fulfilment of desires. We need to fulfil our desires but there has to be respect for the desires of other people as well as our own. The third aim is the fulfilment of commitments, duties and obligations in relation to oneself, the family, society, the cosmos and God. This provides the basic foundation through which one can become aware of one's inherent duty. These three basic principles are the seeds of social traditions all over the world, past and present. The fourth aim of the social tradition is finding out who one really is and achieving liberation or *moksha*, which is a natural outcome of the first three.

However, due to our diminished mentality, we cannot understand the actual reasons for a social tradition so we

rebel against many things. Later on we realize that we should not have rebelled. Rebellion against a tradition is due to immaturity of logic and lack of clear mental awareness and perception. Whether we follow a social or a spiritual tradition, one thing has to be clear: both traditions must be understood in light of the ultimate goal that they are urging us to strive towards, and not for the fluff and rigidity that has become attached to the tradition through the ages. This latter understanding represents the mentality of ordinary people without a vision.

We must make an effort to live the values that the visionaries have defined over the ages. By living these values we naturally follow a parampara, a tradition.

Could you talk about the misuse of psychic power in everyday life?

Psychic power comes to a person who has made an effort to achieve it and who has attained the proper level of evolution. Just as one can attain the ability to express oneself through music or the different arts and sciences, one can also attain the ability to express oneself psychically and use these powers.

This ability has nothing to do with the personality type that we have. Some personalities may be tamasic and others may be sattwic. Even a tamasic person can acquire psychic powers through effort just as a sattwic person can. However, the way they use them will be different. The first category will use them for personal power, the second for cosmic benefit: *Sarvesham svastirbhavatu, sarvesham shantirbhavatu.*

According to one's nature, when the right time comes, psychic power may manifest in one's day-to-day life. Psychic powers are nothing extraordinary. To attain psychic power through the practices of yoga has been considered simple by the yogis. Once one has the knowledge, then attaining psychic power is not difficult. However, if one attains it without having the correct knowledge, then one can misuse it. That use and misuse depends on one's nature.

You reap what you sow, that is the main law of the psychic powers. You have become the *bhokta*, 'the enjoyer'. You have to suffer the consequences; you have to suffer the karma whether positive or negative.

Could you talk about those people who become disappointed with their religion, take to yoga and then feel the necessity to reconcile themselves with their original spiritual ways? Is each path not exclusive of the other?

Yoga has nothing to do with our personal religious beliefs. If you are disappointed, it is your problem and not yoga's. Yoga is quite clear that the final realization has to be your own. In fact, even the different spiritual traditions in India have been very clear in their belief that intellectual analysis and any form of expression can only guide the awareness and consciousness up to a certain point and not beyond. If you consider God to be transcendental and indefinable then even the scriptures are wrong, because they attempt to describe something that is indefinable or transcendental through language, which is a limited medium.

People tend to become disappointed by religions, specifically organized religions, because there seems to be a conflict between the actual practicalities of life and the modern, ethical values that are taught in an organized religion. Many times one's own inability to understand the true precepts of religion can lead one to disappointment, but that is mostly a personal affair depending on how you perceive your life and what you perceive your religious involvement to be.

Yoga does not prescribe to that way of thought at all. Rather it aims at intensifying your personal experience, your personal involvement with whatever belief you might be attached to, and giving deeper meaning to that experience. Therefore, yoga is acceptable to the majority of people once they come to know what it is and what it aims to provide. As long as you do not know what yoga is there will be a misconception about it, for example, some think that yoga

is a pagan form of religion because they have no knowledge of it.

Could you please talk about having faith in oneself? How this faith developed and what is its role in spiritual development?

Faith is generally translated as having belief in something, having a certain conviction which may not seem logical. It is believing that things can happen, things can change, and things can be attained. It is this subtle, internal, unmanifest feeling that becomes the basis for spiritual growth, because when faith becomes logical and known, then the concept of miracles is separated from it.

A miracle means something that is a natural manifestation of Prakriti and Purusha. For people who have never seen TV, it is miraculous. Just consider yourself to be an isolated person in the world. You have never set your eyes on any other human being or their contraptions. Walking through the jungle you come across a TV. You will think it to be a very strange sight; miraculous! That concept of seeing something that is non-human increases faith.

Faith is a feeling of deep inner security and satisfaction which is necessary in order to boldly take another step. Faith becomes the motivating force which keeps the energy, the spirits, high. In times of difficulty and need, it is only faith that brings one out of that circumstantial condition; the certainty that something will happen to make things all right. When things do become all right for a person who is emotional and devotional by nature, it may appear as an act of God or one's ishta devata. For an intellectual it may seem as if a miracle has happened. It can take on different meanings for different people.

Yoga considers faith to be the motivating force which propels one to the realization of one's true nature. Faith in Sanskrit is *shraddha*, and one of its meanings is to be in the vicinity of truth. Thus, if you look at faith from this angle, it becomes the motivating factor for and the basis of our

evolution and growth, mentally, externally, internally and in every sense. This deep conviction and experience can also bring life to a dead object or person, because it is a force.

To develop faith you have to learn to let yourself go. The very moment you do this you will have faith. You should have freedom of personal expression, without any inhibitions, but within the limits of dharma, within the limits of preordained universality. This free expression of human nature within the limits of dharma is faith. This does not mean that we can say, “Oh, I can express myself fully and not care about anybody, about any culture or nation”, which would, in every way, create disharmony.

Balanced expression will eventually allow one to let go of the archetypes, the impressions stored inside, and then there will be faith. In order to recognize this, start living yoga. Understand the principles of yoga, practise it and apply it, do not just know it intellectually. Only then will you have the right to say “I have been practising yoga for many years.” For you can be practising your whole life, but without the application of yoga, you will not have the right to say, “I practise yoga”.

I am a karma sannyasin and I will be going back to my country and job. How can I support your silent revolution and your mission?

You can support the mission by being aware that you have a role to play in the evolution of humanity, and by projecting your best front. Whether you are a sannyasin, karma sannyasin, jignasu sannyasin or any type of spiritual aspirant, or even a beginner on the path of yoga, does not really matter, so long as you have a philosophy to guide you.

Religion is not a philosophy. If you are a Christian, remain a Christian, if you are a so-called Hindu remain a Hindu, if you are a Buddhist, remain a Buddhist. You can be anything you want to be, but you have to have an identity, a philosophy.

What do you really aspire for in life? You can become a sannyasin of the highest calibre; follow a tradition or an

idea to obtain your aspiration. You can be a karma sannyasin living in the world and maintaining a spiritual identity. You can be a jignasu sannyasin gradually starting to change the set patterns of the mind and working with yourself. Or you can be a hatha yogi, practising asanas and pranayamas day in and day out for years and years.

If you want to help in this silent revolution then recognize your strengths, recognize your weaknesses and try to work through them. Ask yourself, "What is it that I lack in life?" Look externally first, then step-by-step, take a look at your body, your mind and your emotions. What do you want? What do you lack? What are your needs? You may live the life of a saint for years, but it should not happen that you react strongly to something and subject yourself to sensory reactions over which you have no voluntary control and awareness. There should be recognition of oneself and of one's nature, and an effort should be made to improve. Life is too short to achieve much, but if it can be utilized properly, then even the smallest achievement will become the biggest gain for the whole of humanity.

This is what you have to do on the personal front. When you project yourself outside to society, to friends in your home environment, in your work environment, in your cultural environment, you need to project yourself with love and compassion. How you do it is your problem. You may know that someone is a crook, but what is the use of shunning that person and those samskaras? Why should you be affected by that? Project yourself differently. This will be the aim of the silent revolution, however long it takes, whether ten years, or a lifetime or ten lifetimes, that is not the criteria. We should know that we can change the environment of our own personality.

In order to improve yourself, go headlong into yoga, not just asanas and pranayama and meditation, but experience every form of yoga. Experiencing means perfecting one form of yoga. Go through an entire branch. If it is karma yoga, give it your best shot. Do not think of it as routine.

The concept of routine is the concept of time created by the mind, but if you take it as a new moment of action, and give it your best every time, it becomes karma yoga. Dive into bhakti yoga headfirst, right from the first form of bhakti to the last, giving it your best shot. Once you start hitting the bullseye, there is only victory, there can be no loss.

Therefore, experience the yogas in their full form. If you go to a place like an ashram, then live according to the rules of the ashram, these create a change in the atmosphere. If you go to another country, respect the rules of that country, its culture and tradition. Forget about the peculiarities that may exist. There has to be an openness of vision, openness in action, openness in life, in thought, word and deed. This openness can be had through yoga, by following it systematically and by perfecting each stage.

What is the love that you have spoken and written about in relation to spiritual life?

If you have not understood what I have written and said before, you will not understand what I am going to say now.

Our life is not one of independence, but interdependence. We are all dependent on each other. We see interdependence in the house, in the ashram and everywhere. Independence is never actually seen anywhere, in anyone's life. You can be sure of this. As long as we are interdependent, our expressions of love are also interdependent on our concepts, beliefs, thoughts, circumstances and actions, and on other people's thoughts and behaviour as well. Dependency is continuous. Therefore, whenever anyone talks of love, they are only speaking from the perspective of interdependence. There cannot be a universal approach to their life.

The spiritual level is something that cannot be spoken of, it is something that is unwritten. Tears flowing from somebody in a state of happiness, joy, contentment, meditation or ecstasy, is not spiritual or transcendental. It is an expression of interaction, whatever the thought, feeling or idea may be.

Who was the very first guru?

According to the sanatana tradition, the tradition followed in the Indian subcontinent, the very first guru was Lord Shiva, and the very first disciple was Parvati, his consort. Why was the name guru given? It is because the word *guru* means 'dispeller of darkness' and that darkness is *avidya*, ignorance.

Tantra actually predates recorded history, the most ancient history known to mankind. In the tantra shastras, Shiva is the guru and Shakti is the disciple. Shiva talks about every conceivable philosophy, practice, lifestyle and even diet, which can help a person be a better and more complete personality. In the literature of tantra you will find many such texts which convey the idea of continuity of life from material to spiritual. The entire range of life was discovered and discussed in the tantras. Since Lord Shiva gave Parvati specific directions in the practices of tantra, thus describing the process of how to make the whole structure of life better and more complete, Lord Shiva is considered to be the Adi Guru, the first guru.

The guru-disciple contact is through ajna chakra. Once ajna chakra is awakened, communication with the guru is on a psychic plane. When the communication takes place with the guru through ajna, neither you nor the guru actually speaks, nor is either of you thinking, but a connection takes place in the psychic realm. The contact is purely a transmission of energy.

That connection is one of energy because the guru of ajna chakra is not the same physical guru whom we relate to on the external, physical plane. It is the universal energy which the gurus transmit in the process of their own state of enlightenment that is experienced in ajna chakra. It is the energy or current, the wave, that when tuned in to can fulfil the most immediate need of the disciple, giving an answer and providing a direction for the future.

Therefore, this kind of communication is on a non-verbal, non-mental, psychic level and you are not aware that it is happening. It only happens when the mind reaches a

state of sensitivity. Only once the communication has taken place do we become aware that we had the communication, and the physical guru may not be aware of it, for it is not necessary that he is aware. There is a great possibility that when he begins to search his own energy field he will notice a part missing, a chunk which has come to you. Then, through analysis he may also know what has actually transpired.

Do intelligent people with sharp mental faculties have a better chance of attaining spiritual realization than those who are not so intelligent?

Yes, they do, because intelligence is not intellect. Intelligence comes from a deep understanding and this understanding may not necessarily be rational. It may not be intellectual. Intelligent people who have sharp and clear minds can obtain experiences more rapidly than those who are not so intelligent or who may be highly intellectual.

The intellect and intellectuals create waves of ideas, systems of perception, systems for analyzing; everything that happens has to fit within the pattern that they have created for themselves. This does not allow them to perceive the undercurrents of the subtle nature of interaction or communication between themselves and the cosmos. These subtle currents are very important for our understanding and growth.

Intelligence is something different. It is related more with deep understanding, with something perceivable and known internally to be correct. The basis of intelligence is inner understanding. This inner understanding will only be possible if the mind is clear and sharp and you are at peace with yourself.

Yoga and other similar systems advocate that, in order to experience life fully, the faculties of head, heart and hands – intellect, emotion and action, must be developed. Ultimately, when you progress along the path of yoga the last step is surrender; the ability to let go. When surrender actually happens, bhakti awakens. Then the web of intellectual

comprehension we have created around us simply dissolves. Intelligence is the force that eventually takes you closer to knowing yourself.

What is your concept of disease and how would you apply it to modern life and medicine?

Disease is known in Hindi as *roga* and the opposite of disease is *bhoga*, which can also be translated as ease and enjoyment. This may sound peculiar, but it has also been emphasized in the Upanishads that the totality of creation is to be enjoyed; whether we enjoy pleasure or whether we enjoy pain, the only duty is to enjoy both. Thus, that which we actually enjoy, that which makes us comfortable, happy and content is *bhoga*.

We derive pleasure from external objects, but when it becomes too much, we lose self-control. This influx of indulgence creates an imbalance and we suffer. If you overeat for one month continuously, you will see what happens to your stomach. Try indulging in sweets regularly, what will happen? Disaster! When it becomes indulgence, it is definitely bound to create an imbalance in the natural state of body, mind and spirit. This imbalance is *roga*, disease. Disturbance in one's ease equals dis-ease.

Yoga aims at the eradication of this imbalance, so that the nature of the body and spirit can join in harmony with each other. The mind is not the predominant factor in the expression of life, neither is the body the main tool, nor the spirit the predominant factor in attaining different states of creativity, desire and action. There has to be total harmony. This harmony leads one to perfection, and this perfection is known as *yoga*. Thus, *yoga* is the means and also the end.

My Aikido instructor taught that success in Aikido requires the practitioner to have the inner attitude of *zanchen*. Translated from Japanese, this means pride. Your teachings seem to contradict this, implying that 'pride comes before a fall'. How can both teachings be true?

In this case, both teachings are right. According to yoga it is wrong to have pride based on the knowledge of “I know this to be like this”, etc. This gives birth to arrogance, inflated ego, and so forth. Yoga, however, states that pride has two sides, positive and negative. Pride based on one’s own experience and conviction is the positive side of pride, known as *vishwas*. The negative side of pride is *andha vishwas*, or blind conviction.

Just as the opposite of avidya is vidya and the opposite of ignorance is enlightenment, vishwas, conviction, and andha vishwas, conviction based on fantasy and imagination, are two different things. Pride due to conviction is something to be aspired for, but pride causing arrogance and further developing the sense of human individuality, of me as being a more unique person than I was before, is wrong.

Therefore, yoga does not condone the pride which is known as *ghamand* or arrogance. It condones vishwas, the conviction arising out of one’s own experience. This is also known as *shraddha*, the awareness of the principles of truth. Pride is not the correct translation for *zanchen* anyway. It means something different, but the approximate translation is pride.

On our spiritual journey, how can we know what our next step is and when to take it?

If you have to think in these terms about your spiritual journey, it means you are not thinking correctly and you are not following the spiritual path. If you consider yoga to be the spiritual path, you are wrong. Spirituality is a state of mind, a state of consciousness, a state of perception, a state of being, “I am.” It is a state to be aspired for. The different methods existing in the world today, whether they be in the form of religion, *darshanas*, philosophies, or practices such as yoga, are only tools through which a change in the normal conditioning and pattern of mind can occur, ultimately enabling us to experience spirituality.

Spirit is *atman*, and once you step into the dimension of atman you are there. The experience begins to unfold

as a uniform experience. We may experience cold or heat, beginning from our toes and rising up through the body, but that is not a uniform experience. It is a growing experience. We may then take a handful of sugar and put it in our mouth and have the uniform experience of sweetness. There is no growing experience of sweetness inside the mouth. Therefore, spirituality is like this uniform experience of sweetness while the different processes of yoga, the darshanas or religions, the dharmas, are the growing experiences.

In spirituality, you do not need to take another step. You may need to take many steps, thousands, maybe millions in the course of either one lifetime or many lifetimes, to understand the process of the growing experience, something having a beginning and an end. Once you reach the end of the growing experience, the uniform experience is samadhi. It is spirituality. It is *atma jnana*. It is the word *atma jnana* which comes closest to the English word 'spirituality'. *Atma* means spirit or self and *jnana* means knowledge. *Atma jnana* is a living, continuous and uniform experience.

How do you watch yourself? Can we watch our minds? How can we do that?

You can never watch your mind, and you can never watch yourself. You can only watch your reactions: reactions which are physical in nature, reactions which are emotional in nature, reactions which are intellectual in nature and reactions which are spiritual in nature.

Why do you even think that you act? You do not act. I do not act. We live according to our nature. Action only happens when you create a change for the betterment of yourself, and this idea of betterment is based on a broader vision of life. Actions related to motivated thoughts and desires are only reactions of the mind on the external plane.

Therefore, it is incorrect to say that one should observe the mind, and it is also incorrect to say that one should observe oneself. It is more appropriate to say, "Observe your reactions, how you live, how you react to life, how you

react to being what you are, without desiring to become something else.” That is the right terminology – observe your reactions.

The moment you are able to observe your reactions, an understanding gradually dawns that you can make them better, more beneficial, more positive, more for universal rather than personal gain. In fact, the practices of yoga are devised in such a way that you are made to observe your reactions. After all, what is antar mouna? It is a practice in which you need to observe your thoughts. Thoughts are creations and those creations are due to reactions. Whether they are positive or negative is irrelevant. A negative reaction will create a negative thought. A positive reaction will create a positive thought. In antar mouna we are made to observe them, to stop them and to change them.

A similar thing happens in chidakasha dharana. The visions that we see are created. They are reactions taking place in the tranquil plane of chidakasha. In the same way, the purpose of the practices of prana vidya, ajapa japa, yoga nidra and the entire group of pratyahara and dharana techniques is to teach one to observe one’s reactions. Thus, in answer to your question, the best way to observe yourself is to observe your reactions.

In a yoga nidra tape by Swami Satyananda I once heard him say that one should aim high in one’s sankalpa. I concluded that the only thing worth asking for is enlightenment, but every time I make this sankalpa I always think, “This is too ambitious, I do not even know what enlightenment is.” It makes me feel a bit foolish. Does a sankalpa have any power?

A sankalpa that is not intellectually understood by the mind has more power than a sankalpa based on rational understanding. The head and heart are two major components of the human personality. Yoga and tantra both say that one should awaken feeling, but many of the modern cultures advocate the opposite. In the harsh conviction of

the head, the intellect, we tend to ignore the feeling side of our personality, and the separation of these two is likely the cause of a split or disunity in our behaviour, thinking and actions. This disunity is experienced and expressed through our actions, beliefs and performance.

Tantra and yoga have always advocated the awakening of feeling and the control of intellect. Therefore, a sankalpa that is based on a feeling will have much deeper results than a sankalpa that has been thought out rationally, when one has decided, “I want to do this”, because this rationality totally isolates the feeling.

Do you ever think or plan how you are going to express love? Do you plan it or read about it in a book before actually expressing it to somebody, or is it spontaneous and natural? When it is spontaneous and natural one gains a deep insight into oneself, while in the case of disunity, the insight is lacking. Thus, a sankalpa based on a feeling will definitely be more powerful than a sankalpa that has been put through the filtering process of the intellect and rationality.

As we are changing all the time, how can we find out which sadhana is appropriate for us?

We have a sadhana correspondence course. You get a sadhana which you practise for two months. Then you fill out a questionnaire and send it back. On the basis of what you have experienced and what difficulties you have had, an individual sadhana is devised for you. Every three months it changes until it becomes a very individual sadhana befitting your aspirations and needs.

Many times I hear people say, “I have been meditating for so many years and I feel like I could do with something more.” So, this kind of sadhana is a progressive thing which is monitored every three months, and it also encourages you to send a questionnaire every three months so the practices can be selected to suit your individual needs and development.

What is will, and what is its connection with sankalpa?

Please do not confuse English words with Sanskrit words. Sankalpa has no connection with will, and I have no idea what will is as defined by the English dictionary.

Sankalpa is a direct mental force. It is a concentrated state of mind. *Vikalpa* is a dissipated state of mind, where the mental energies are totally scattered. There is no control over the thinking process, no control over emotion or reactions. Total disharmony within the mind is *vikalpa*, uncertainty, distraction, too much pull in different directions. The reverse of this is *sankalpa* or concentrated mind, where all the faculties of mind have fused and become like a laser beam.

When the *sankalpa* becomes powerful, can you imagine what the combination of all the mental energy can do to a person or to the environment? Christ was able to change water into wine by thought alone. That is *sankalpa shakti*, mind over matter. This *sankalpa* has to be cultivated from the normal states of dissipation that we experience every day. How do we achieve this? We give instructions to the mind. We choose a positive and constructive train of thought. Then we make a short, simple and clear sentence like we do in yoga nidra, and try to focus our mental energies towards that *sankalpa*, towards that idea or concept which we have created.

For many people the *sankalpa* can take a very gross form, and for many it can take a transcendental form. For a yogi, the *sankalpa* can be to help humanity through the power of his or her mind. For a chain-smoker, the *sankalpa* can be, 'I will quit smoking'. The positive, creative, constructive, and uplifting idea that we create, the one that brings a change in the personality, is known as *sankalpa*. Whatever the *sankalpa*, it can create a change in the global and cosmic energy field, in the field of consciousness.

Siddhas have a particular form of *sankalpa*. Yogis have another form of *sankalpa*. With the gradual training of the mind to focus the energies on one aspect, we are eventually able to have a *sankalpa* that becomes more universal and powerful. Your *sankalpa* leaves the self and becomes one

with the cosmos. Therefore, sankalpa is definitely not willpower. It is something more than that. Sankalpa is also not determination. Determination may not necessarily have *viveka*, discretion, in it or be influenced by *vairagya*, non-attachment. Therefore, determination is not sankalpa and will is not sankalpa. Sankalpa is the fine-tuning of the mind.

In most paintings of Lord Shiva he is shown carrying a trishul and damaru, with the river Ganga flowing from his head and a half moon. What do these represent?

We can really only guess. Thinkers in this part of the world have used a lot of symbology to describe a theory, idea or concept. When people look at the gods and goddesses of the Indian tradition they go crazy. Some gods have a thousand tongues; others have four, twelve, sixteen, or a hundred arms. Some have the face of an elephant or a lion. These symbols have been used by Indian sages to express an idea.

One of the ancient myths found in the *Rig Veda* is that of 'Purusha Sukta' which says, "The Supreme Self has one thousand eyes, one thousand heads, and one thousand feet". These large numbers represent the idea that every aspect of the manifest is nothing but the expression of divine energy, which we call God, because nothing can exist except as an extension of God. Everything is an extension of that divine force.

Shiva is the force responsible for creating transformation. He is also referred to as the Lord of destruction, meaning the destruction of what is old, so the new can come forth. He is the Lord of change and transformation. When does this change and transformation take place? When the eye of intuition, the third eye or the eye of Shiva is opened and activated, a new dimension of perception is experienced. Shiva is the only deity who is depicted with the third eye.

The trident which Shiva carries represents the three forces of nature, and a person who has awakened the third eye is able to control these three forces of sattwa, rajas and tamas.

The damaru represents the eternal nada, the eternal cosmic sound. Sound is created only when two things come together. If there is only one hand then sound cannot be created. It is necessary to have two hands to clap; one hand will not clap, it will just make a whooshing noise. Try clapping with one hand. The damaru represents the process of transformation when two things come together.

The conch also represents nada but the continuity of nada, not the dum-dum-dum sound of the damaru, but one continuous eternal and unbroken nada. There is broken sound with the damaru and uniformity with the conch. Intermittent sound is created when there is manifestation according to time and space. If we make a second noise a few seconds after we make the first, it will be heard separately, but if a noise is not separate even for a milli-second it can be called continuous. Thus, control over the gunas and prakriti in the manifest dimension is represented by the symbol of the damaru, while control over the unmanifest, unbroken nada is symbolized by the conch.

The Ganga flowing out of the head of Shiva represents purification and the aquarian nature, which desires to fulfil the thirst of people for higher vision and realization.

The crescent moon represents the mind which waxes and wanes. Some people really go loony during a full moon and we call them lunatics. Others become depressed, while some get anxiety attacks, and some throw tantrums. Control over the waxing and waning mind is represented by the crescent moon on Shiva's head. Every symbol used in the description of any god or goddess has a definite meaning behind it and in much of the tantric literature the meaning has been explained.

How are digestive juices and the digestive fire related?

The digestive fire is related to prana, the energy which makes our cells and atoms tick. Without it the body will still have the potential to function, but it will be dead matter. Yogis developed a concept of classification of prana according to its nature and performance.

There are five pranas: udana is responsible for thinking, analyzing and for all the head-trips that we experience. The energy which is responsible for expulsion of waste matter from the body is apana. The energy that sustains the body is samana. The energy responsible for the physical maintenance of the body, regulating breathing, heartbeat, mental functions, emotions and feelings is prana. The fifth force is vyana and is the surplus energy in the body. According to the different activities of the body parts and organs, the energy which acts differently and moves differently has been classified into these five pranic categories.

The digestive fire is the activation of samana energy, which is responsible for converting matter into energy. Digestive fluid refers to the large amount of secretions that are secreted from the mouth to the end of the intestines. Saliva is secreted in the mouth, digestive enzymes and acid in the stomach and bile in the intestines, while protein-digesting enzymes are secreted from the pancreas. In the intestines, they break down further into unit elements such as amino acids, sugar, glucose, fat, minerals, vitamins and water. Finally, they are absorbed in the intestines and assimilated by the body. This process of secretion, movement through the intestines and assimilation is called digestion.

What does the word bhakta mean?

A *bhakta* is one who is devoted, who follows the path of bhakti or devotion. Bhakti is a practice, not an emotion, state of mind, idea or philosophy. It is a process.

In bhakti, nine different stages have been defined, one evolving into the next, in much the same way as the raja yoga system: yama evolves into niyama, asana evolves into pranayama, pratyahara evolves into dharana and dhyana evolves into samadhi. In the same way, there are nine aspects of bhakti.

The first stage is being in the company of saints. Saints are very rare these days; it is not an easy thing to find a true saint standing on the corner of the street. Being in

the company of a saint can also mean that you have to be aware of spirituality and of your other identities; you have to become aware of your own spirit. When you are able to change the environment within you and around you, you can be termed a first-degree saint. Being in the company of saints is the aspect of bhakti which evolves the awareness of the inner nature.

The second stage of bhakti is listening to something inspiring about the lives of the saints, which can create an urge within you to raise your consciousness. It can enable you to find something more positive and constructive in your life. You can actually control the manifestation of each and every state of mind, emotion and intellect.

There are seven other stages of bhakti, but I am not going to elaborate on them. Bhakti does not mean blind devotion; rather, it is a process of consciousness related to a feeling or an emotion. Once you are able to alter this state of consciousness which is related to an emotion, then you can also transform the selfish emotions into selfless ones.

A bhakta is a person who follows the path of bhakti yoga, not someone who sits starry-eyed in front of the guru and keeps on staring without blinking, and saying how pure and beautiful the entire thing is. That represents an unreceptive state of mind, where the real essence is not being captured; rather it is ignored because of the conditioning of the mind and emotions. Even the search for transcendence is ignored; life remains external, it does not become internal.

From your perspective, what is a human being?

I do not have a perspective because I do not have the ability to recognize a human being. This ability is a quality or state of mind in which one sees not the external manifestation, but the inner nature. About that inner nature, there is a whole discussion in Chapter Twelve of the *Bhagavad Gita*, which is about bhakti yoga. Bhakti is a state of being where the ego has been totally surrendered, allowing the inherent creative qualities of life to manifest spontaneously and naturally.

There are many other statements in this chapter and each concerns the realization and recognition of a state in which universal vision is expressed harmoniously, through friendship and compassion, in the idea that 'I am not the possessor of the mind'. Being without pride, without ego, being balanced in pleasure and pain, having a forgiving nature and being content is like being an eternal yogi with firm determination.

In this way, many different qualities have been enumerated, and the attainment of these qualities makes one a bhakta, where the ego does not stand in the way because it has been surrendered to the will of God. When that ability has been attained we become human beings. Intellect and knowledge are not the only means through which we become a human being; they are only a part of this process of bhakti.

In order to recognize someone who has these qualities, one also needs to have a different vision. That different perception is a must before one can recognize a true human being. How do we recognize ourselves? We create certain ideas about ourselves according to the most predominant trait in our personality, or rather, according to the most predominant guna or quality. In the same way, opinions are formed about others.

The way I look at another person is according to the opinion I have created within myself concerning that person. However, if I am wearing coloured glasses, how will I know the colour of reality? What is the colour of a true human being? An effort has to be made on behalf of the enquirer to recognize a true human being. A person who expresses bhakti is not necessarily the epitome of humanness, because there are many followers of the bhakti path who express completely opposite qualities, while many who follow their own nature express the above qualities.

Therefore, instead of trying to know, I would suggest that you first try to take off your coloured glasses, so that you can recognize a true human being when you see one, and that will not be a tainted image.

I find it difficult to identify with Bihar School of Yoga as an institution. What might be the reason?

One should not identify with the institution because in an institution there is a mixture of people. Some are selfless, some are ambitious, some are saints and some are crooks. One can use the institution as a medium to express one's abilities, but the aim, the vision and the mission should be that of the founder.

Sri Swamiji had two main things in mind. One was the propagation of yoga so that people could get to know their inner nature and self. The other was the development of the possibility to help the needy, not only in the form of charity, but also in the form of compassion. He founded the Bihar School of Yoga and later Sivananda Math with these two ideas in mind. They are the main foundation on which we are trying to build.

Now I am trying to convert the Bihar School of Yoga into an open university so that, alongside yogic training, a proper education of yoga can be given. I feel that yoga training can only take you up to a certain point, while yoga education can take you further. We will have degree courses in the university which will allow the study of one specific branch in depth, and will allow the student to build upon it more and more. Right now we are digging fifty holes in fifty different places in an attempt to draw water from the ground. Actually, we have to go in-depth by digging one hole of fifty metres in order to find that water.

Through this open university we will make the effort to dig fifty metres in one place; and that will be the new trend of yoga education. I do not want this place to be a yoga centre. I want it to be a centre where you can learn the traditional, spiritual sciences, and in the course of time, the knowledge of other traditions will also be taught. I feel that this kind of work will fulfil the vision of Sri Swamiji better than teaching yoga to groups who come and stay for fifteen or twenty days.

How can I be aware of dharma while living in society?

It is a difficult question and the only thing I can say is that you have to experiment with yourself. I think the best way to go about it is to follow the SWAN theory, and also move according to your commitments to yourself, your family and society, because we have many unavoidable commitments in our lives. As we learn to adapt ourselves to different commitments according to the situation, the concept of individual dharma is clarified. You cannot be neglectful towards the society in which you live, because dharma is physical, material and social as well as individual and spiritual.

You can also start developing some useful qualities. By being creative and open, by being considerate to yourself and to others you can come to know your dharma. Dharma has a different meaning for different people. Musicians have their dharma in relation to music. Sannyasins have their dharma in relation to sannyasa. Dharma can also take the form of perfect karma yoga, with total dedication, one-pointedness and clarity of mind. It is something you have to experiment with.

How can I deal with my ambitions in a positive way?

If your ambition is powerful then you should try to see the reality of it. Is it your personal ambition or is it for the good of many? Is it selfish or selfless? Is it something that will improve your future life or is it a fantasy? In all these stages you will have to use discrimination, and you should not be attached to any manifestation you might experience.

Do not be attached to any ambition. Develop viveka and vairagya, the two balancing factors of the SWAN theory. *Viveka* is discrimination and *vairagya* is non-attachment.

Could you please discuss the practice of developing self-awareness by witnessing our thoughts and actions? What are the techniques to develop and maintain this practice, and what are the effects?

The witnessing of the mind relates to the techniques of pratyahara and dharana: eighty percent of pratyahara and twenty percent of dharana. In order to develop total awareness it is important to be alert in every respect and from every angle. There should not be a moment of being unaware, of being unconscious of one's actions, thoughts, reactions and behaviour, both internally and externally.

The mental processes occur in many dimensions simultaneously. It is like a ripple beginning in one place and ending at the opposite side. In the same way, a physical action can affect the entire psyche, the conscious, subconscious and unconscious mind. Even an impression of the psyche, a karma or samskara of the unconscious mind, an ambition or desire of the subconscious mind, and the knowledge of right and wrong in the conscious mind can affect every single layer of the personality.

What we think, how we act, and the ultimate result of the action are all interrelated. Therefore, in the yoga practices, asanas have been given equal importance with the techniques of pratyahara and dhyana. They all have to be practised and perfected. One cannot say, "I will excel in meditation and not practise asanas." Nor can one say, "I will practise only asanas, I do not need to practise pratyahara, dharana or dhyana." There comes a time when asanas lead you, naturally and spontaneously into meditation, through the states of pratyahara and dharana and even pranayama. There also comes a time in deep states of meditation that you experience your own psyche, and then the body begins to perform asanas spontaneously.

Therefore, as per the yogic tradition, not a single area of the personality is to be discounted; they all must become known to you. There should be no rejection, no blanking out of any particular state of either body or mind. In order to develop self-awareness, there should be a process of observation. There has to be constant awareness.

Yoga says first observe something external or manifest, and then move into observation of something invisible or

unmanifest, yet which affects the entire personality. In this way, the entry and journey into the practices of yoga actually begins.

Pratyahara is important. The different techniques of pratyahara, from the well-known ones like antar mouna, ajapa japa and trataka, to the relatively unknown ones like smriti dhyana and antar drishti, to name only a few, tend to make the practitioner aware of what is happening in the realm of buddhi, chitta, manas and ahamkara. When we begin to observe our thoughts, we watch an interaction between manas and buddhi. When we begin to analyze our thoughts, we are watching the play of manas. When we perceive negativity or positivity, frustration or anger, we are watching the manifestation of ahamkara.

Like this, we are made aware of the fluctuations in the conscious and subconscious mind, not the unconscious. We are made aware of the process through which the extreme fluctuations of the different states can be brought under control. After these mental states have been recognized and brought into harmony, concentration is achieved, marking the beginning of dharana. Therefore, if you practise the techniques of pratyahara with sincerity, you will be able to develop self-awareness and the ability to be a witness to what is happening within you.

How can the aspirant ensure that their spiritual journey is not motivated by any other ambition?

We know that we have ambitions when there is a desire to achieve some quick result or gain. There is ambition when we are not spontaneous and natural in our actions. There are ambitions everywhere, even in sannyasa life, and in every type of spiritual life, because we are looking forward to knowing something, to experiencing something, and the drive propelling us to the fulfilment of ambition often creates a mental split. At this point, we cannot be natural or spontaneous.

Many times this mental split is experienced in the form of conflict: conflict of morals, conflict of ideologies, conflict

of personal relationships and interactions. The story goes on and on. In many traditions it has been said that one's aim as a sannyasin is to be ambitionless. In the process of sannyasa there comes a time when even the desire to know God, which also represents an ambition, must not exist. The desire to be liberated, to experience ananda, shakti or chetana must not exist.

Yoga classifies desire into three main types: *iccha*, wanting; *kamana*, desire to satisfy the senses; and *vasana*, obsession. Other forms also exist. In English, desire is just desire, but in Sanskrit it is classified differently according to the individual events or motives. One of the methods that can be utilized to overcome these different forms of desire, whether selfish or selfless, *sakama* or *nishkama*, is to adopt the path or sadhana of gradually letting go of one's hold over the tendencies of the mind. I would even use the word *vritti*, patterns of the mind.

In one sense yoga means control of the vrittis; in another sense it means to be free from the vrittis. There is a difference between controlling and having freedom from. In order to be ambitionless, you do not have to control the vrittis, but be free from them. If you want to exert control over anything, it reflects the state of having ambition, 'I want', desire has come in. This aspect of letting go of the vritti and being free is reflected in the meaning of the word *samarpan* or surrender. In order to overcome selfish, or sakama, desires, you have to practise sadhana. You have to make an effort. You have to control the vrittis, to direct and guide them. When you want to overcome the nishkama or selfless desires, then you have to surrender.

Sadhana and samarpan are the paths of effort and surrender. In the path of effort we have a combination of practices such as asana, pranayama, hatha yoga, raja yoga, meditation, pratyahara, and dharana – the entire structure of the yogas. In the path of surrender there is also an effort to adopt and imbibe a lifestyle directed towards one ideal or person, a guru or master; somebody who can be the keeper of your trust. The guru should be the keeper of your trust.

However, generally, although we may say outwardly, “I trust you”, the guru is the last person we approach if we find something distracting or distressing in the ashram environment. Gossip will circulate through the entire ashram before reaching the guru. This is the form of the so-called surrender. It is not surrender at all. It is a whitewash we have placed on top of the idea of surrender.

We have a fear of opening up, and generally we seek either an emotional or intellectual opening. We try to find somebody who can talk with us nicely, with whom we can be friends and have a good time. Our emotional opening up is to somebody with whom we become attached. The result is that when we are away from that person we feel a sense of pain. This form of opening up does not allow for actual opening to take place, this can only happen between two individuals who consider each other as guru and disciple. No, the opening does not take place, and one remains in the same spot spiritually.

Ashrams have to become places of opening up and finding the right source where you can give your trust, and not your hang-ups, for safe-keeping. There is a difference between the place where you keep your hang-ups, fears and frustrations and the place where you keep your trust. To sum up, the separation of ambition from sannyasa life evolves through the process of surrender and by no other means.

What is the best way to stop undesirable thoughts from turning into undesirable actions, or even to stop such thoughts from arising?

If every undesirable thought actually turned into action, then you would definitely be an undesirable person. First of all, you have to accept that you are not living a life full of goodness. Just as the entire interaction in the universe is divided into day and night, light and darkness, the entire structure of our personality, thought, behaviour, ambitions and intellect have distinct compartments; that of knowledge

and that of ignorance. Where there is knowledge there is viveka and where there is ignorance there is aviveka.

The so-called negative traits, thoughts, and actions arise when aviveka is predominant. When we have creative, balanced and constructive thoughts then viveka is predominant. In the interaction of manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara there are four faculties that are influenced by viveka and aviveka, knowledge and ignorance. Sometimes the expression of ego is full of knowledge and wisdom and sometimes the ego is a horrible thing. Sometimes thoughts are positive and sometimes those same thoughts coming from the same person are negative. This fluctuation always takes place.

The energy centre of the earth shifted from Central America to India during the era of the Mayans and Aztecs. Now it seems that it is moving back to America. Can you say something about that?

A very great problem exists between South Americans and Indians. South Americans are so isolated that they think the Himalayas came to Nepal from the Andes. I used to have very intense discussions about this when I was in South America. The mountain range in South America extends from Colombia right down the west side of the continent, and the people there consider it to be the spinal cord of the planet. There are various energy centres which are said to be the chakras of the planet. The fact is that every place on the planet has an energy centre. Some energy centres become active only for some time and then become dormant again. Some energy centres are active for a long time.

It is not right to say that energy points have shifted. They still continue in the same place, but according to their biorhythm they go through states of activity and passivity. There were definitely active energy centres during the period when the Mayans, Aztecs and other ancient civilizations walked in South America. There are also many active energy

centres in the British Isles, Ireland, France, the Scandinavian countries, Italy, Greece, the Middle East and South-East Asia, including India and China.

Historically, we can see that each civilization and culture reached its apex when the concept and understanding of energy and mind was extremely high. There also came a time when people could not control that energy and its effect on the mind, and the decline of the civilization began from that point onwards.

I do not think we should worry about the centres of energy on the planet because they are guided by cosmic biorhythms. One thing we should be aware of, however, is the human understanding and involvement in the activation and use of these energy centres. It is the manner in which human beings respond to the different energy points, both as individuals and as a community, that is important.

A continuity of wisdom has been maintained throughout history in some countries like India. Despite the external political and social changes, spiritual traditions have been a very strong and powerful part of the Indian culture. A similar continuity has been maintained in China and Japan. These are the three countries in which the ancient civilization has not died out. Their ancient wisdom continues even today to guide the cultural life of the people. However, when the ancient Atlantis, Celtic, Druidic, Mayan and Aztec civilizations declined, their traditions were lost, thus the continuity was broken.

There is a global awakening now and people are looking into different methods and techniques. Many new concepts came up in the sixties, seventies and eighties, and many have disappeared again. For example, in the early days of the hippie movement many new techniques and sciences developed, but because most of them were not able to fulfil people's needs, they disappeared once again.

We must base our values on the original tradition. If we try to create our own values we might be successful for some time, but eventually we are bound to fail, because we identify with

values required by us only at the present moment and which do not hold a vision for the future. The traditional values, on the other hand, are based on a vision of the future. If we identify with these we will be able to maintain our contact with true spirituality. Normally we invent things according to our own understanding; we are not visionaries, rather, we are self-centred people who seek personal gratification.

Therefore, how can we give a proper role model to a value which is pure? For example, the concept of love: you must have heard Sri Swamiji repeat, "Love thy neighbour." Is this commandment only something spoken by a saint, written in a scripture or the word of God? Whatever we may think, it represents a value we have heard about a thousand times. Then why are we not able to live it? It has been said, "Be truthful." It has been said, "Feel no animosity for anyone." Why are we not able to live these values?

The moment we start interpreting them according to our personal concepts, they become the means of attaining more power, of boosting our own self-image and ego. Although we talk of love we have never experienced love. We talk of truth but we have never realized truth. We talk of compassion and harmony, without any real understanding of either.

Human beings are more important than any value which can be put before them, and they have to develop the capacity of absorbing true knowledge. The capacity to live that wisdom has to develop in them. They have to cultivate the capacity to implement the proper values. In order to attain all this they have to work very hard. This process of working with oneself comes with the urge to experience spirituality.

People say that spirituality has to do with God, that God-realization only takes place in those who are spiritual by nature. That is rubbish. True spirituality is knowing, implementing and living the creativity of the head, the heart and the hands. When you can do that, the resulting inner harmony will make you aware of the divine presence. That is true spirituality. One theory of spirituality says, "Sit down,

contemplate, pray, meditate and realize.” Another theory says, “Don’t sit, be active, know and experience and share the harmony.”

This was the message of Swami Sivananda: serve – remain active, dynamic and outgoing; love – be in tune with everything and everyone around you, don’t have animosity for anyone but feel the oneness with everyone; meditate – go into a meditation where you can experience that inner harmony and live it; realize – through the experience of meditation move into the state of realization where the body and mind become the tools for the expression of divine energy.

One system emphasizes active realization and the other emphasizes passive realization. Today, active realization is more appropriate. Maybe in the future we will move into the passive area when our minds, our environment and the world are more at peace. Maybe then the environment will be more conducive for us to just sit down, pray and experience the inner unity, but now is the time to ‘reach out and touch someone’ through the dynamic process of living spirituality.

It would appear that yoga as a progressive science has been dead for hundreds of years. What is your vision for yoga and how does the Bihar Yoga University fit into that vision?

There has been a rise and fall of yoga and the misuse of yoga practices by different civilizations and political systems. It has been established without a doubt that yoga was once a worldwide culture, although it may not always have been given the name yoga. The postures, theories and meditation techniques found in different cultures throughout the world, whether in Scandinavia, South America, Africa or Asia, represent different aspects of a yogic tradition which was once widely accepted. However, due to changing social situations and conditions, natural calamities, and the decline of civilizations, yoga disappeared from many parts of the world.

The collective mentality of people also changes. In one era they aspire for power, in another they aspire for wisdom, and so on. We have passed through a worldwide phase where the general mentality was not receptive to the practices, theories and benefits of yoga. There was also a time when benefits and achievements gained through yoga were misused by people, to gain control over certain sections of society. The seers witnessing this misuse then made it inaccessible to the normal person. When they witnessed humanity progressing along different lines and saw that the time was right for yoga to re-emerge as the heritage of humanity, they released it.

The first person who brought the message of yoga to the world in this century was Swami Vivekananda, the disciple of a very great seer of our times, Ramakrishna Paramahansa. We do not know much about the intimate life between Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, but I am sure that at one point Vivekananda received clear instructions and guidance regarding his future work from Ramakrishna, which later became the guiding principles for the establishment of the Ramakrishna Mission. As part of this process, Swami Vivekananda propagated the theories and practices of yoga. After him, many other people carried on the work and vision.

Traditionally, sannyasins are very peculiar people. I do not mean ordinary sannyasins like us, but the true visionaries who are able to see the direction that humanity is taking. They come out to guide people with whatever knowledge and skill they have. If they see that humanity is not responding to what they are trying to give, they withdraw and wait for another opportunity. Then the whole system becomes a very secretive system again.

I can sense many of the questions going on in your heads right now, “Why do yogis not choose the right time, why do they have to withdraw?” The answer is experimentation. If they wait for the right time, they may have to wait for thousands of years, but if they can find a niche where they

can put in one nail with one hammer, then they have taken one step towards the creative conditioning of society and humanity.

Yoga deals with life in totality and the aim of yoga has always been to promote understanding, harmony and inner awakening. Understanding creates a better environment for people to interact in. Harmony creates a better environment for people to handle their mental states so they can live life without excess struggle. The awakening of the human personality provides us with the opportunity to use our inherent potential and faculties. This has been the basic approach of yoga, and according to the needs, personalities and mentalities of people, different methods have been adopted from time to time.

If we look at the cultural history of India where yoga was preserved, we will see that in medieval times, bhakti yoga was the most prevalent yoga in Indian society. That was a time when great bhaktas and saints walked the land. Prior to that there was a re-emergence of hatha yoga by people like Swatmarama, author of *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, sage Gheranda, author of *Gherand Samhita*, Goraknath and Matseyendranath, foremost propagators of hatha yoga, and Dattatreya, author of *Dattasamhita*. In another era, raja yoga was developed and practised throughout the nation. There also came a time when the practices of kriya and kundalini yoga were propagated by people like Babaji, Sri Yukteshwara and Paramahansa Yogananda.

After the very strong bhakti movement when we had people like Mirabai, Surdas, Kabir and so many others, there was a gap when no bhaktas came forward. Then jnanis came, followed by another gap, after which hatha yogis came. Then there was a further gap; but I have not found one instance in the cultural history of India when there was no yoga in the country. There has always been some aspect of yoga prevalent at any given time.

Now is the era or the age of integral yoga. An integral yoga awakening is taking place which does not follow

any specific yoga. As Sri Swamiji says, an individual is a combination of the faculties of head, heart and hands. Therefore, it is necessary to awaken these three faculties together. What is the use of awakening the faculties of head, intellect, if the faculties of the heart, emotions and hands, practical action, are not being utilized? What is the use of awakening only the faculties of the hands, creativity, action and performance; if the head and heart are not being utilized? What we are seeing now is a new direction in yoga, but the aim of yoga has always been the same: understanding, harmony and awakening. With understanding, harmony and awakening you can walk to enlightenment without any problem. If you have awakening but no understanding then forget it – no enlightenment, no moksha, no samadhi, and no nirvana. If you have understanding but no awakening, you are in the same position.

I cannot say that I have a vision for yoga. I am not a visionary. I still have a long way to go, and I pray that I never get that ability, because it is a big responsibility and can take one into states of depression. I feel that our job is only to make yoga accessible to different people in society who are working at different levels of being.

Until 1993, the Bihar School of Yoga taught yoga in the classroom environment. We used to go out and conduct programs, seminars, conventions and workshops. That was the only yoga work that went on, but this year we have covered a lot of new ground in different areas of society. For me, this year has been a new beginning for applying yoga in these different areas, for example, introducing yoga into the different medical colleges in the state so that yoga can eventually become part of the medical syllabus of the country.

I am not referring to experiments that have been done by people here and there, but of something solid which hopefully may change the future for the better - a movement, a combined effort, not just individuals struggling here and there trying to do their own thing and not gaining any ground. This year yoga has been taught in state prisons

with the purpose of reforming those living behind bars. It has been taken to the army, not with the concept of ahimsa or himsa in mind, and not interfering with the duties of the soldiers, but simply trying to help the people manage their mental problems in a better way.

The establishment of the yoga university here with the three faculties, yoga philosophy, yoga psychology and applied yoga, provides opportunities for conducting investigations, research, study and reports of the different aspects of yoga. This will enable people to go into society, work in different places and apply the training they have received here. This year a lot of change has taken place in the direction of yoga, not only in India but also in European countries and Australia. I feel very optimistic that solid work can be done in the southern hemisphere with the help of the yogic establishment and the people involved there. We will not just confine ourselves to simply teaching yoga, but will become part of society.

I spent six weeks in Europe studying the situation and environment there, and I feel that unification of yoga in Europe will be possible, Unification of Yoga in Europe – U.Y.E. Once U.Y.E. comes into being, I am sure that Europe will take off. Let us see what happens in the American continent next year, United Yoga of America, U.Y.A. I feel in my heart that this year we have accepted a big challenge and a new beginning for yoga. However, as the saying goes, “Man proposes; God disposes.” Let us keep our fingers crossed and hope to become part of a united force.

What is kayakalpa? Why do yogis die of disease? Can they not cure themselves?

Kayakalpa comes from the tantras and it is an interesting concept. In the tantric system it is believed that the *tattwas* or elements, which our body is made of, are unchanging, undecaying and eternal. In the manifest world, where we continually go through the cycle of birth, life, death, after-life due to the influence of *prakriti* or manifest nature, the full

potential of the tattwas is never utilized. They go through a process of decay and regeneration; but if we can experience the nature of the unmanifest tattwas then we can maintain continuity of the physical body. The tantrics have even attempted to maintain the continuity of the body through a process of *kayakalpa*. *Kaya* means body and *kalpa* means rejuvenation or regeneration.

In the available tantric literature the process of using different herbs and a natural lifestyle have been described, unfortunately nowadays, most of those herbs are extinct and those that may still exist are in very remote corners which are unknown.

Tantra also states, and yoga confirms, that if you can get in tune with your body, you develop a natural siddhi. By siddhi I do not mean cosmic power, but the ability to communicate with yourself, to regenerate the body and also to make it disappear. This power has been demonstrated by those yogis who have had a lifespan of many, many hundreds of years. One such yogi is Mahavatar Babaji, the eternally youthful saint who was the propagator of kriya yoga.

Another idea which has been emphasized in the tradition is the direction of the pranic flow in the body in such a way that it is in harmony with the cosmic pranic energy. It is then possible to generate a body out of nothing, and to dissolve the body into nothing. There are stories of different saints whose bodies merged with the environment after they died. They died a physical death in the sense of death understood by us, but they continued to live on in another body, having the ability to manifest and live like normal human beings. Such people do exist.

When Sant Kabir died, in the place of his body they found only flowers, the body disappeared. The body of the woman saint, Mirabai, merged into the image of Lord Krishna. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's body dissolved into the image of his deity. After Sri Yuktेशwar died he appeared to Paramahansa Yogananda and continues to appear even to this day to other devotees. This experience has happened to

Sri Swamiji also. Swami Sivananda has appeared physically before him many times since his mahasamadhi.

What is this ability? The body can definitely be preserved for eternity, but one must know the application of the divine law that controls the body. How does that cosmic law apply in this changing world? The yogis who have this knowledge never continue with the same body but move from one dimension to another. When they are needed here, they come down in the physical body and you can touch them and feel their solidity. Then, when their work is done, they disappear once again.

Quite some generations ago an event occurred in my family whereby a sadhu who had a very old body said, "This body is useless to me now, I need to change it." Instead of rejuvenating his own body he decided to select the body of a person who had just died, and transfer his soul into it. This is another tradition where the soul is transferred from one body into another, carrying with it the same memories, knowledge and perception.

Shankaracharya left his sannyasin body and entered the body of a king who had just died in order to know about sensual pleasure. Once he had gained that knowledge, he left the king's body and came back to his own. There are people with this ability living in India today. I know one of them and I have seen them do it. Therefore, there is no doubt in my mind that it can happen, but I cannot tell you the name of that person.

There are two systems of kayakalpa, and one is this transference of the soul from one body to another. The other method is perfecting kaya siddhi. Here the body follows the natural course of life, dies and, when needed, is manifested again.

As far as the question regarding yogis dying of disease, I have seen them die of disease, but not their own disease. The disease is the outcome of the karmas which they accumulate from other people. Ramakrishna Paramahansa had throat cancer and when people asked him why he did nothing about

it, he said, “Yes, I have the power to cure my throat cancer. I can ask the Divine Mother to heal me (he was a bhakta of goddess Kali). However, this cancer is not mine; it is due to the karma which I have accumulated from my disciples. They have gone through purification, but they have to dump their negative karma in some place and if they dump it on other people then those people will suffer. If they dump it on me and I accept it, I know how to handle it. I will not suffer from the negative karmic effects.” That is why he died of throat cancer.

In the later stages of his life Swami Sivananda suffered from diabetes. The funny thing was that his prayers were so powerful that he could heal others far away, but he did not try to heal himself. He said, “This is a karmic disease which I am suffering, not my own physical disease. This is the negative karma of others I have taken upon myself.” Diabetes stayed with him right to the end of his days.

Another event occurred in the life of Swami Sivananda which the world does not know about, but there are photographs to prove it. When he left his body he was in a sitting posture and his body began to levitate. Heavy rocks and weights had to be placed upon his body to prevent it from floating off into the cosmos. People had to hold him down, and you can see the magnetic attraction of his body pulling the bed-sheet, and everything upon which he sat, towards him. I do not understand why they did not simply allow the body to merge into the cosmic energy!

For those who attain realization, it is not only a psychological process, or an experience that deals only with consciousness, but it is also physical. Every cell and atom in the body experiences the state of realization. In this state, the concept of mind over matter is defined and emphasized very strongly. If the mind becomes pure the body also experiences cosmic consciousness. In the state of physical enlightenment, the body can burn different kinds of karma.

Normal human beings, struggling to live happily with greater awareness and understanding, need to work intensely upon themselves in order to come to the point where

their body also becomes enlightened, but for those yogis, sadhus, saints and luminaries who have attained cosmic consciousness, the body poses a problem. In that state of realization they do not go against the laws of nature. Even in Christianity we have the ascension of Christ. He was crucified, resurrected and then there was the ascension. Now, that ascension was physical and I can believe it to be true. After knowing about the experience of Swami Sivananda, I can accept the fact that Christ physically went to heaven.

How can I find my dharma and follow it?

It is the realization of one's dharma in relation to family, society, the world and the cosmos that is ultimately important for our evolution. Once we have that realization our entire attitude, behaviour and actions will undergo a change.

There is one problem, however. In order to understand the cosmic and global dharma, we need to talk in terms of the spiritual dimension. Since we do not have first-hand experience of this spiritual dimension, the total concept seems to be very vague and abstract. How does one talk about God? How does one talk about perfection? How does one talk about one's interaction with the higher forces? That is where the major problem arises. Even the simplest of philosophies tend to take a religious view, although spirituality is actually nothing but harmony in the physical, subtle and spiritual dimensions. It is this realization that the different masters and teachers try to give their followers.

Another problem arises in the form of the different personalities that exist in the world. You can divide the human personality into four major categories: the dynamic personality, the emotional personality, the intellectual personality and the psychic personality. These four major personality traits are important when we talk about developing our vision of life. The system which we follow can often contradict our nature. For example, if you follow the path of jnana yoga while your nature is that of a bhakta,

meaning more emotionally inclined, then to understand the concept of jnana yoga will be very hard for you. You will tend to be more involved in the practices of devotion, prayer and meditation. If you try to explain the theories of bhakti to a dynamic personality it will be difficult for him to understand what you are trying to say.

Teachers who have attained some state of realization should be able to observe what the nature of our personality is and to give a teaching accordingly. By following that teaching and developing our inherent faculties to the maximum, our relationship with the environment will undergo a change, because there is no questioning involved. What we feel inside, we will also project externally.

According to the yogic theories, there are five ways of expressing our personality. The first is through *annamaya kosha*, the physical body. The second is through *manomaya kosha*, the mental body; even your desires and planning for the future represent the mental plane. The third is through *pranamaya kosha*, feelings and vibrations. The fourth is through *vijnanamaya kosha*, intuitive ability, and the fifth is through *anandamaya kosha*, the expression that comes out of the feeling of joy. For instance, when you come into the presence of a master, all your problems and cares seem to drop away and there is a total blank; only the feeling of happiness remains. At least that is what happens to me when I go and see Sri Swamiji. It is a sign that anandamaya kosha is manifesting.

We also express ourselves in different ways according to our personality traits, and conflict arises when we think of a path or system which seems right for us, but which actually goes against our nature. Confusion arises and a very big spiritual crisis occurs because we are trying to adjust to a path or system that goes against our nature. Then, the entire process becomes a matter of mental gymnastics.

Therefore, we have to take three things into consideration: one, knowledge of our personality and nature; two, choosing a path according to our personality; and three, through that path, trying to discover our dharma in relation to the world

and universe. If we are able to do these three things then we can say that we have found our dharma. I feel very strongly that God-realization or self-realization is just a result of having harmony between the mind and the spirit. You cannot contain all the waters of the ocean in one pot. In order to unite the water inside and outside, the pot has to dissolve. Similarly, all spiritual practices aim at dissolving our limited individual pots. As a consequence of that dissolution of the individual self, realization of the higher self takes place.

In order to understand something transcendental, we need to change our entire perception, which can only take place if there is an understanding, an awareness of the external environment and how we interact with it. Just as a headache is a symptom of stress and tension, knowing one's dharma and realizing God is a symptom of having achieved harmony in all dimensions of the personality. Ideas and concepts, theories and practices can be given to you by each and every spiritual master, but eventually you have to use your own judgement and to walk alone.

It would be good if you could encourage other people to understand the real process of yoga, because society today has gone beyond the need of asana and pranayama, and we are even going beyond the need of using yoga as a means of stress management. There is a different kind of awakening in the world today in relation to dharma, so if you can try to inspire people to know something about themselves in a spiritual light, it will be of great service. Teach them meditation and some physical practices, along with some ways of recognizing their strengths and weaknesses. Give them encouragement to overcome the limiting factors of their life. I am sure many people will benefit.

What is the difference and the connection between the vama and kaula paths in tantra?

There is a big difference between vama and kaula. The word vama is derived from the root *vam*, meaning the left-hand path of tantra. The word kaula is

derived from the root *kaul*, meaning that which follows a family tradition.

The *vama* or left-hand aspect of tantra represents the aspect of shakti. Even in yogic terminology the right side is solar and the left side lunar. The right is pingala, masculine and the left is ida, feminine. This same concept is known in tantra as dakshinachara and vamachara. *Achara* means lifestyle or conduct, so *vamachara* is the conduct related to the shakti aspect or vama.

The other aspect of tantra is dakshinachara. *Dakshina* represents the right, the masculine energy, the solar force, the lifestyle or conduct which aims at awakening consciousness. Just to give you a comparison and a better understanding of what vama stands for, the aspect of dakshinachara, related with the growth of consciousness, can be seen in the process of yoga, and more specifically, in ashtanga yoga or raja yoga, in which we find the practice of *yama* and *niyama*, the disciplines and code of conduct; *asana* and *pranayama*, postures to awaken the awareness of the body, and breathing to regulate the fluctuations of the mind; *pratyahara* and *dharana*, self-observation and concentration; *dhyana* and *samadhi*, meditation and the culmination of meditation. These practices deal with being a witness to our actions, reactions and universal actions. Being the witness of all types of interaction eventually leads the practitioner to evolve a different state of consciousness.

In vamachara, the path that explores the dimensions of energy, tantra says that there are specific manifestations of energy of which we have to become aware. The manifestation of energy in its raw, uncontrolled form is experienced externally in the form of an emotion over which we have no intellectual or conscious control. We may realize that what we are doing is wrong, but we cannot stop that feeling from arising. We may realize that being angry is not good, but we cannot stop the anger from arising. We can realize that too much craving is bad, but we cannot stop the sensorial and sensual desires. We know that fear is a state of mind, yet

we cannot control it. We also know that unconsciousness is the disconnection of energy from consciousness, and yet we cannot prevent the disconnection.

These four aspects of the raw manifestation of energy are known as *ahara*, *nidra*, *bhaya* and *maithuna*. *Ahara* is craving. *Nidra* is the disconnection of energy from manifest consciousness, so that there is no actual cognition of what is happening outside, as occurs in the state of deep sleep. *Bhaya* is fear, which arises out of an intense thought, feeling or whatever it may be. The highest form of fear is *abhinivesha*, the fear of losing oneself, or death. *Maithuna* is the need for fulfilment of sensorial and sensual desire. These four aspects have to be controlled and re-channelled.

How do we control these four aspects? In the tantric tradition, many techniques have been defined that enable one to experience the areas of the personality which actually cling on to a particular manifestation of the senses and mind. In order to transcend this deep-rooted original attachment, and to overcome and sublimate the raw manifestations of energy, various practices were devised by the sadhus and rishis. Some of these practices may seem idiotic, unnecessary, gross, or even horrible, but they can nevertheless form a part of one's sadhana. The total acceptance and transcendence of life is the sadhana of a tantric, total acceptance without any rejection, without any suppression.

I will give you an example concerning Paramahansa Ramakrishna. In the state of intoxication he used to experience the actual presence of the Mother. Once, while walking beside the river, he was overcome by the feeling of the Mother and entered into a state of samadhi. At that time a very rich devotee of his brought food for him which was of the highest quality – halva, puris, kheer, and rasgulla. Ramakrishna, although immersed in samadhi, had a certain awareness of the external world, so he accepted the plate from him, and when he ate the first morsel, his mind thought, "Oh what a delicious taste!" He immediately controlled himself and said, "Mind, you are now going to the food, stop it." A novel

method which he adopted to tame the mind was to actually go to the roadside, pick up a handful of human excrement, put it on his plate, and along with one morsel of rice pudding, consume one morsel of human excrement. To many this may sound like the act of a psychotic. In normal society it would be considered absurd behaviour, but not for him. At that time he followed the vamamarga of tantra. He could have affirmed to himself intellectually, “No, the food is not to divert my awareness of the Mother”, but he decided to give a shock to the mind and stop the manifestation of the energy experienced in the form of his enjoyment of that sweet dish. This is a practice of vamamarga.

Another practice, one for controlling fear, is to meditate in a graveyard, and if you can handle that kind of meditation then a more advanced form is to sit on a dead body and meditate. Tantrics have devised very strong ways to shatter the normal conditioning of the mind. Vamamarga is the path of the warrior, it is not the path of normal practitioners, and there is no craving for vamamarga either.

The third form of vamamarga is to control *nidra*, sleep, by developing intense and powerful willpower through the practice of meditation, certain practices involving yantra and mantra, and invocation of higher energies within the body. That way it is possible to avoid the disconnection of energy from consciousness.

The fourth form of vamamarga is the fulfilment of maithuna. There are some people who take these things too literally and say, “Oh well, tantra accepts me as I am, so let me indulge myself.” No, tantra does not permit this. There is no indulgence of any kind, because if there is indulgence then there is no tantra. Tantra is a path beyond indulgence, because tantric philosophy views the entire creation as the indulgence of Shiva and Shakti, a play or *lila*. This *lila* of Shiva and Shakti is known as *srishti*, or creation, the creation of new things all the time; new ideas, new concepts, new views, new thoughts, new ambitions, and new desires, new likes and dislikes.

If there is indulgence in more things then there will be more creation. Therefore, tantra does not allow any creation to take place because it aims at attaining the pure state of Shiva and Shakti, which is beyond manifestation. Its aim is to achieve pureness of spirit, and not the state that is tinted and tainted by the various colours of the manifest world.

In fact, different tantras have clearly stated that if tantra permits the drinking of wine, and says that by drinking wine it is possible to attain self-realization, then all drunkards would be self-realized. If tantra says that by indulging in sexual activities it is possible to attain self-realization, then we would not have the need to follow any other path of yoga, or religion, or different traditions. Just get married and be self-realized! In the *Kularnava Tantra* which is one of the most literary tantras available, it is clearly stated that there is no use in wine, grain, meat, fish or sex, the five *makaras* which attract everyone's attention so much. The *Kularnava Tantra* has said that all these things are unnecessary.

The whole process of tantra has been devised to enable the practitioner to have control over the mind, and if you want to experience what that control is like, and how to control raw energy, just experience normal life. When you go to the pub and have a drink, that experience should be the means to understand the state which is attained after drinking, and to then obtain it without drinking. If you have a sexual relationship, then use that gross experience as a platform to discover the higher experience of a current in the head, mind and personality. Then try to obtain the same experience without any help.

This is the way to gain control, awareness and sublimation: use the normal experiences that you have in the course of your daily life. If you are not able to understand an experience after having it once, then you will not ever understand it. It means there is some sort of block, and in order to remove that block you have to come to the dakshina path of tantra.

Therefore, *vamachara* is acceptance of life and the transcendence of mundane life by utilizing the normal day-

to-day events and experiences in order to understand and realize the higher self, Shiva and Shakti. Shakti becomes the medium through which Shiva is ultimately realized. When Shiva is realized, there is awareness that Shiva and Shakti are the same, not different, and that you are not different from them.

Kaulachara is a path of tantra which gained prominence in the region of North Bihar, Bengal and parts of Orissa. Kaula is the family tradition and in this tradition, the head female is the guru and initiates the son and daughter into the path of another tantra known as Siddhantachara. *Siddhanta* means a path which has a perfect ending. *Siddha* means perfect, having all the qualities, faculties and powers of the universe under one's control. *Anta* means end or culmination; the philosophy, practice or path of culmination, which results in total mastery over the elements.

In kaulachara, people are initiated by the shakti which in a family happens to be the senior-most mother figure. She is even permitted to initiate the husband, sons, daughters and close relatives into Siddhantachara. Outsiders who do not belong to the same lineage are not given this initiation. You have to be part of the family tree in one way or another. This used to be the traditional belief. Maybe, over the course of time some people deviated from it, that is another matter, but the tradition is within the family and after the death of the first mother figure, the next female in line becomes the guru. The males are always the disciples.

The system of kaulachara is a very important branch of Shaktism. Shaktism is Shakti predominant with Shiva as the disciple: energy directing consciousness. In Shaivism, Shiva is the dominant force and Shakti is the disciple: consciousness guiding energy.

What is the difference between one's karma and one's samskara?

There is a definite difference between these two words, although karma seems to be simply an extension of samskara.

Karma can be literally defined as a process of action, which can have different meanings in various areas of our personality. In relation to the senses, karma means an action which is performed by the senses. In relation to our mental state of mahat (manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara), the performance of karma is simply an impression of one of the four faculties manifesting itself. A manifestation of ego, buddhi or chitta can be an expression of karma.

In relation to the psychic dimension or the deep subtle consciousness, which is not experienced and therefore unknown, karma means change. This change happens in the unknown dimension of consciousness and the energy guides the efforts of the self towards external material fulfilment. It is in this context that we talk about karmas.

Generally, we talk about karma as if it is our destiny over which we have no control. It is very powerful and guides the behaviour and all the interactions of an individual. In many spiritual traditions, even the concepts of pain and suffering, happiness, name, fame and status is attributed to karma. Karma simply means an interaction of the natural process of expression of supreme consciousness and transcendental energy. This is the tantric viewpoint.

It is said, and it is understood also, that what we call supreme or transcendental consciousness and energy are in a state of harmony, equilibrium and total peace with each other. However, in the process of creation this state of tranquillity is disturbed by some event which disrupts the state of harmony, balance and peace. This disruption reaches out to the manifest world through the fields of consciousness and energy.

The entire philosophy of tantra can be summed up in a few sentences: into a totally still and peaceful lake an external agent drops, say a stone or even a leaf, which disturbs the tranquillity of the water, creating ripples. These ripples, no matter how gentle or strong they may be, ultimately reach the shore and expand the area of water. This is how we actually understand karmas in relation to consciousness and energy.

Karmas manifest in the realm of energy, and it is the movement of energy which further taints the pure nature of consciousness. When this happens, we experience the primordial tattwas: *ahamkara*, *chitta*, *buddhi* and *manas*. The faculties and forces of these four states of mind become very active, yet what has actually fallen into the field of energy is nothing but a deep desire for change and growth. Whether it is taken in a positive or a negative way it really does not matter, because ripples reach out in all directions; they are not a one-directional force. Positive and negative reactions take place and they come from an original desire. When this desire is deep-rooted, beyond the range of *manas*, *buddhi*, *chitta* and *ahamkara*, karma can never be understood intellectually. It can never be known, because the process of knowing takes place through the four faculties of the mind. When one transcends these, then it becomes an intuitive faculty of omniscience. At that time, one attains *moksha* or *nirvana* because by then the original karma has ceased to exist.

Karma is a process of action which ultimately changes and directs one's life and destiny. *Samskara* is something different altogether. The word *samskara* is made up of two words, *sam* and *akara*. *Sam* means equal or balanced, and here it refers to the four attributes of *manas*, *buddhi*, *chitta* and *ahamkara*. The word *akara* means a form, idea or concept that has taken shape because of the seed of karma, the original desire, in the areas of *manas*, *buddhi*, *chitta* and *ahamkara*. Ambition is a form of desire emanating from the desire in *ahamkara*, the ego identity. If there is a desire to become a scientist of high calibre, it is a *samskara* of *buddhi*.

As far as the *samskaras* connected with the senses is concerned, when the senses attain maturity there is a certain flirtatiousness about them. After attaining maturity, different objects become the focus of sensory attraction and this is another *samskara*. Craving can be a *samskara*. Some people eat all the time and they say eating is their *samskara*. Others become insecure very fast for no reason, and fear becomes

their samskara. Some people tend to close up in different circumstances and situations and that becomes a samskara of withdrawing.

Thus, samskaras are related to the senses and the four aspects of mind, while karma is related to a movement in the deeper layers of the mind and consciousness.

How can the concepts of sacrifice, yajna and ritual be integrated into the modern lifestyle of a spiritual aspirant?

I do not think that the *upasana paddhati*, the system of worship of the sanatana tradition, integrating yajna and karma into their lifestyle is a must for every spiritual aspirant. Similarly, it is not necessary for a person who has attained samadhi to become a karma yogi, or for a bhakta yogi to suddenly transform himself into a jnana yogi. Ritual, worship and prayers, havans and different sacrifices, whether performed individually or in groups are simply aids for a particular type of personality. They are not suitable for everyone.

People tend to like rituals because they seem like a novelty, something to try out and experiment with, but later on they discover that the psychic change in the environment brought about by these practices also creates a change in human perception. The aim of yajna, havan or sacrifice, *karma kanda*, is only to create a change in the environment that alters the state of perception and mind of the individual.

Let us imagine that we are doing a havan and suddenly we put a handful of chillies into it. You do not know because your eyes are closed. You can well imagine the reactions, sneezing, burning sensations, watering of the eyes, breathlessness. If it actually happens you would leave the room. However, if we put some incense into it, which is nice and soothing, then even if you are psychologically tense you will become relaxed and happy. When there is involvement and you derive pleasure from the environment, this also creates a change by lowering the stress defence mechanisms of the mind.

Everybody has a stress defence mechanism. We all talk of stress, no doubt, but within the body there is also a stress defence mechanism, and during normal activity this mechanism is constantly on red-alert, because throughout the day we are trying to manage ourselves. We are continually trying to manage our expressions. We are trying to manage our behaviour in whatever situation we may find ourselves, in whatever work we may be doing. There is also a drive to seek out pleasure and happiness, “Oh yes, things are going on nicely. I am happy. I have nothing to complain about.” We want a sense of satisfaction, enjoyment, contentment and fulfilment.

The stress defence is very important in order to allow just a limited amount of information to actually affect our psyche. If all the information were to reach our psyche in one split second, then we would definitely go crazy, instantaneously. We would not be able to handle the emotional shocks. Neither would we be able to handle our feeling of fear and insecurity. The stress defence mechanism helps us to find a point of balance, a place of support from where we can derive strength, and the ability to change a particular situation and circumstance. Allowing this defence mechanism the discipline of an educated mind, it is possible to create a total change in one’s personality, and that has been the aim of upasana, havan and yajna in the vedic tradition.

In the vedic tradition, awareness expands to encompass each and every aspect of creation. We can identify the different *devas*, the forces which control an element. There is Indra, god of air; Varuna, god of water; Rudra, god of fire; and Brahma, god of earth. The Vedas speak of the *devas* or the dominant force in every form of creation; flowers, trees, everything, and say that all these are the aspects of the evolving consciousness, or Brahman. This is the awareness that the vedic karma kanda and upasana kanda give to the aspirant. Upasana is the means, the ritualistic way to reach a state of realization, by changing one’s inner and outer environment. It is not necessary for a spiritual aspirant to

adopt any of these means of upasana or karma kanda. One can lead a healthy spiritual life without them.

The tantric tradition is more specific. Tantrics differ in their approach. They say that the real cause behind everything perceivable, witnessable and experiential are the twin aspects of Shakti and Shiva, who are independent entities. When they come together there is creation, and when they separate, each one is an individually potent force. The tantrics based their system of thought on the concept of Shiva and Shakti, whereas the vedantins based their system on the concept of Brahma.

The three divisions of the ancient spiritual tradition are *jnana kanda*, the chapter of knowledge; *upasana kanda*, the chapter of worship; and *karma kanda*, the chapter of ritual. In the course of your own growth and sadhana, if you feel the need, and if you are advised to do so by your guru, then you can take up and derive benefit from the upasanas. Otherwise, just stick to your jnana kanda practices that you have been doing until now.

Can you say something about dharma and how we can improve on our own personal dharma?

Whether we are sannyasins, karma sannyasins or householders, let us try to understand this word ‘dharma’, first from the traditional and then from the modern point of view.

The traditions have categorized karma and dharma in the manifest dimension into four groups. First, is karma and dharma in relation to artha. *Artha* means economical satisfaction and fulfilment. Second, is karma and dharma in relation to kama. *Kama* means fulfilment of desires and ambitions. Third, is karma and dharma in relation to a personal philosophy which is conducive to our spiritual attainment. Fourth, is karma and dharma in relation to the attainment of *moksha* or realization – following a spiritual discipline.

This is how the Indian and yogic traditions viewed the entire mixture of events taking place under the influence

of karma and dharma. All the events controlled by karma and dharma are experienced by us in day-to-day life. As a sannyasin, painter, businessman or spiritual aspirant, in every aspect of our life, this combination of karma and dharma can be experienced.

Karma is not just physical action but the entire set of events changing and altering the gross, subtle and causal dimensions of the personality; the conscious, subconscious and unconscious mind. A thought, feeling or emotion is a karma of the mind. Having a desire is another karma of the mind. The karma of the body and all its organs is fixed. Through the eyes we can see, we cannot hear. Through the nostrils we can smell, we cannot see. Each and every function of body, mind, and psyche, as well as each and every alteration in their perceptions and all their interactions are termed karma. In life one is always performing karmas, in the state of sleep, in the state of wakefulness, and also in the state of meditation. All these manifestations of karma create a reaction over which there is no human control.

The result of the normal karmas is known as divine karma, the karma which guides our destinies. It is this divine karma which changes the karmas of the human body, mind and psyche. Therefore, our karma reflects the cosmic karma, and the cosmic karma reflects our karma. It works both ways. Even what we say creates karma. When we express something physically, verbally or visually it creates a karma and these karmas are important in order for life to move forward. In the absence of karma there will be stagnation of the personality.

The karmas performed by the body, mind and psyche also create samskaras. These samskaras in turn influence our attitudes, desires, motivation and ambitions. The whole thing becomes a very intricate process which the individual cannot easily understand. When these actions are not understood, there is personal identification due to the influence of the samskaras. This becomes the cause of attaining experiences of pain and pleasure, happiness and frustration, anger and depression, all the pairs of opposites.

Only when we are able to disassociate our mental attitude from the karmas that are being performed by the body, mind, senses, and psyche, does the real karma yoga take place. That is, disassociation of personal attachment from actions. Karma yoga, when directed towards the fulfilment of a mission, is known as *seva*, or service. The action which is being performed is surrendered to the Divine Will with the attitude, "I am not the doer. I am not the enjoyer of the results of this action." That form of service is called *ishwara seva* or guru seva; service performed through the will and desire of someone to whom we have surrendered. It is also known as *nishkama seva*, service done without any desire for personal gain.

Until we have developed the attitude of *seva* there remains awareness of the 'I' performing it. As long as this identity of 'I' remains, it is not guru seva or *ishwara seva*. When the idea that 'I' am performing is lost, then that devotion, dedication and surrender converts the entire process of actions or karmas into guru seva.

Another form of *seva* is known as *sakama seva*, service motivated by selfish desire. The spiritual aspirant has to progress from the state of *sakama seva* to *nishkama seva*, by changing his attitudes and having a positive philosophy to guide his thoughts, beliefs, actions and mental stability. There should be no fluctuation.

Now let us look at dharma. Dharma means having a sense of discipline and harmony. Dharma is the concept, knowledge and experience of the interaction that takes place in the realm of idea, form and object. When I see someone whom I respect very much, say my guru, then in front of him my entire attitude and performance changes automatically. The state of my body, mind and psyche is different than usual. If I interact with an idea of God in my mind, then again my emotions, thoughts, feelings and attitudes will be different. If I interact with an object, then again my performance will be different than when I am not confronting an object.

In each state there is a certain pattern of expressing and interacting in the dimension of name, form and idea. This interaction comes from the knowledge of right and wrong, just and unjust. The knowledge of just and unjust, right and wrong is known as *viveka*, the process and power of discrimination between that which is just and that which is unjust. Acting in accordance with is dharma, a set pattern of expression, interaction, behaviour and attitude depending on the circumstances and events to which we are exposed.

The dharma of an individual can be in relation to the family. Making sure that the duty we have taken upon ourselves is completed to the fullest. Providing our children with a proper education, samskaras, attitudes, thoughts and behaviour and giving them every possibility of expressing themselves fully. The dharma of a sannyasin can be trying to help others as much as possible within his or her capabilities, all the while maintaining a spirit of compassion and love. In every stage of life one can have a different dharma. A student, farm worker, lawyer, doctor, and engineer all have their own particular dharma.

When dharma interacts with karma then karma becomes very powerful. It becomes creative, and this creativity is not only felt externally, but internally and psychically also. Therefore, we should always try to be aware of the karmas we are expressing and that are happening within us, and we should also be aware of our dharma, the right application of our mind according to circumstance.

For example, if someone is feeling hungry and you do something about it, then it is good. However, if you know that a person is hungry and you still say, "Let him look after himself", then this is not applying the mind correctly, because by ignoring the need of that person you are ignoring your own dharma which is to support the other person with a selfless attitude. By right application of the mind you will find that many of the problems that you face in your day-to-day life, such as dissatisfaction, anxiety, tension and stress, gradually subside as you become more and more aware.

In order to develop this awareness, I would recommend that every night when going to bed, do not just go off to sleep thinking rubbish, or about the future or past, but try to see the entire events of the day in front of you as if you are seeing a video. Take your own video from morning till night and when you go to bed, before you sleep, see your video in your mind's eye: "I woke up at this time, and then I did this and that. I had this for breakfast, and then I went out." Review the events of the entire day and see how you interacted with tensions, happiness, joy, anger, frustration, and so on. How did you behave in each circumstance? Was the action or reaction right or wrong? If there is any way to improve upon your behaviour, try to do so.

In the course of time, you will notice that as your awareness continues to grow, it will make you more alert to the conditions and situations being projected at you either by nature or by other people. Then you will be able to perceive what kind of environment you create within yourself, and how it could be changed so that you and others are benefited positively by it.

What items are necessary for concentration of the mind?

The three items used to help the mind concentrate are psychic sound, or mantra, psychic symbol, or yantra, and psychic breath, which brings about expansion of the pranas in the body.

First of all, let us understand the process of psychic sound. The mantra is a vibration and the effect of the mantra on human personality is to free us from the bondage within the mind. This bondage is caused by our attraction to the world of senses. The definition of mantra is *Mananat trayate iti mantraha*, which means that liberation of the mind is the purpose of mantra. Mantras are sound vibrations. Yoga does not consider mantras to be the names of God; rather it views them as combinations of different sounds called *aksharas*, imperishable sounds.

When you look at the picture of a chakra you will discover different mantras or sounds in the form of consonants and

vowels within its petals. The sounds are fifty in number, and out of these fifty, thirty-six form the Devanagari consonants, and fourteen the Devanagari vowels. Of course, the characters are in Sanskrit, using the Devanagari script. These fifty aksharas are the basis of all sound, and yoga has always believed in the science of sound vibration.

In the tantras there is a very beautiful work known as *Spandakarika* belonging to Kashmir Shaivism which describes how a sound vibration can affect the organs of the physical body and the mind. The cells and atomic structure of our body and the mind are influenced by the creation of different sound vibrations. This seems to be very accurate, because we deal with people from overseas who have no preconceived ideas about mantra. For them the mantra *Om Namah Shivaya* does not mean “I bow down to Lord Shiva.” It is purely a combination of sounds which stimulate and awaken the different psychic centres or chakras.

The mantra *Om* is the bija mantra of ajna chakra. The different mantras written on the petals of a chakra, for example, *Na*, *Ma*, *Shi*, *Va*, *Ya*, affect that chakra. *Na* is related to vishuddhi, *Ma* to sahasrara, *Va* to swadhisthana and *Ya* to anahata. By repeating a particular mantra we are awakening and stimulating the energy which is dormant within a particular chakra. That is the theory of mantra in yoga, and for this specific reason it has been said, “Freedom from mental bondage is attained through the practice of mantra.”

Apart from the theory, we can also try to understand mantra from the practical aspect. Every sound vibration creates a pattern, and it is in the initial stage that sound vibration is known as *nada* or the *prathama spandana*, the primordial vibration. This primordial vibration is, according to every tradition, the source from which all life forms have evolved. In the very opening verse of the Bible it is said, “In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God.” Now, what is this word? It is the *prathama spandana* or *nada*.

Mantra is a tool to be used in the states of pratyahara and dharana in order to perfect dhyana. Mantra also provides a basis or support upon which the mind can latch on to in meditative states, so as to avoid lapses into unconsciousness. In the practice of meditation, as you become more involved and your concentration more intense, there is sensorial cut-off. The mind is diverted from the sensory inputs. The senses do not cease to function but awareness is diverted from their activity and focused on a point of concentration. At that moment, there is a tendency to lose touch with the experience of time, space and object. In simple terms, one begins to experience the unconscious realm.

In that stage of unconsciousness a feeling of drowsiness, sleepiness and lack of control over physiological and psychological perception develops. In the state of sleep, when we lose control over the mental faculty, again the mind becomes diverted to different areas of experience, whether sensual or mental. It begins to fantasize about things, to dream, to imagine, and meditation is lost. Therefore, there has to be a support upon which the mind, which has been divested of its identity with the senses, can rest. That is the purpose of mantra in meditation.

There is no bondage anywhere, but due to habit or the conditioning of our minds, we feel that there is bondage. The mind feels the need to have a support, and in our own mind we have to go through the motions of hitching and unhitching our mental 'camel'. This is where mantra becomes important.

Another effect of mantra is that, as the mental activities gradually diminish, or the distraction of the mind gradually stops, improvement of the mental faculties develops. Willpower and awareness improve, concentration and self-confidence establish themselves, and tension disappears. The benefits are endless.

The vibration of every mantra creates an image or yantra in the field of consciousness, as proved by science. The meaning of yantra is very beautiful. Yantra means freedom of the vehicle.

What is that vehicle? It is consciousness. Without consciousness we are dead, inactive, and non-existent. It is consciousness which evolves, and we experience this evolution in all the realms of consciousness, that is, conscious, subconscious and unconscious; the totality of consciousness. Consciousness, *chetana* or *chitta*, is the vehicle through which the life force and the spirit manifest on the visible dimension.

By concentrating on a symbol created by a mantra it is possible to free this consciousness. Therefore, we have the image of yantras or symbols which can be very simple or very complex, depending on our stage of evolution, but do not think that the complicated yantras are an indication of your high evolutionary state.

An individual's mantra can create the image naturally and spontaneously, but not many people know that it is happening. People have had the experience that at the time of mantra repetition an image comes to the mind. Whether it is light, a circle, star, or triangle, a beautiful green, blue or pink light or any other image, this is the symbol being created by the repetition of the mantra in the field of consciousness, and it is the point of concentration.

This is important, because generally in meditation, we sit down and try to blank out. We try to totally avoid and escape from every kind of sensory and mental identity, idea and experience, but because our mind lacks discipline and training there is struggle. The mind cannot be quiet, yet we are forcing it to be quiet, so instead of meditation we go through a process of mental stress. Instead of experiencing relaxation and tranquillity, there is a constant struggle to bring the mind back to the practice from wherever it may have gone, to stop the thoughts from coming, to let go of worldly worries and anxieties.

In meditation there must be harmony between body, mind and prana. In order to achieve this harmony we have to identify with the symbol. The symbol becomes the point we have to focus on. At times of dissipation and distraction we have to bring ourselves back repeatedly to that point

which is the visual focus for our attention. It is very difficult to focus the attention on a non-visual point, even for those people who are God-fearing and who are inclined to the *sakara*, with form, idea of God. They can also use a form of divinity as the symbol, their *ishta devata*, but it has to be emphasized that mantra and yantra, sound and symbol, are necessary in the process of and for progress in meditation.

Please define surrender.

Surrender cannot be defined. When you are deeply in love with somebody, can you define that state? Or when you are experiencing intense fear, can you define it? No, it is not possible. How can you define the state of extreme fear, where there is total disconnection of body, brain and mind? The body becomes like jelly, the brain fuses and the mind disappears, it does not exist! Surrender is something like that – the mind fuses, the brain stops all its electrical activity, and there is no control of the body.

In the context of surrender, when I mention body I do not mean the physical body, but our interaction with the external world and the people around us, life in the house, obligations and commitments to family and friends. That is the external aspect of our life which is known as the body. When there is total surrender and the mind has been affected there is a change of perception in the physical dimension and an acceptance of reality. We tend to block out reality in times of suffering and frustration but in surrender, there is acceptance of reality.

When I say the brain stops its activity, I mean the analytical process, the process which makes us tick in the manifest world. The mind represents the inner self which surrenders itself, and becomes one with another higher self. Once this surrender is complete it is also known as *samadhi*, enlightenment or *nirvana*. Surrender in itself is a *sadhana*. It is not an attitude that I give up my claim on my body, family and friends.

One person came to the ashram some years ago and said to Sri Swamiji “I want to surrender to you.” Sri Swamiji answered,

“What do you want to surrender?” He said, “I surrender my body, my mind and my spirit to you.” Sri Swamiji told him, “All right, you will be tested, but are you sure that you are surrendering all these things?” He replied, “Yes.” So Sri Swamiji said, “Okay, go back to your house and live normally.” At first he fought this saying, “No, I don’t want to go back to my house.” Finally, when he had cooled down a bit, Sri Swamiji said, “I thought you had surrendered, that you had given me your body, your mind and spirit and had said, ‘Do as you wish with me’, yet when I wish you to go back to your house, you fight with me. Is that how deep your surrender is?”

No, this kind of surrender is not real, but this is our quality of surrender. When things seem to go from bad to worse, we say, “What am I doing here?” When we hold back like that, then how can there be surrender? Surrender means being a sailboat and not a motor boat. In a sailboat you can only move as the wind moves you, and you can manipulate the boat to move according to the direction of the wind and eventually reach the shore. A motor boat tries to go against the current; it does not care about the wind but wants a feeling of independence and freedom.

Surrender is actually dependence on the wind, on the power of Prakriti, nature, and of Shiva, consciousness. As long as we have our own motor boat we can never learn to surrender because the engine will be kept running for as long as there is petrol, and when there is no petrol, no gas, we drift out to the sea and are lost.

Surrender is also a skill. Apart from being a sadhana, it is also mental awareness.

Could you tell us what relationship Sri Swamiji still has with his disciples? On what level is he in contact with us and does he still guide us? Is it still okay to direct our mental and emotional energies towards him without it disturbing his sadhana?

As to what relationship Sri Swamiji still has with his disciples, the answer is none, and he has stated that very clearly. He has

also made it quite clear to everyone that he has now to tread a path where there should be no feeling of being something, for instance, being a guru with disciples. I feel that he has closed one chapter of his life and started another.

Regarding the seekers, aspirants and disciples who consider him to be their guru, a role and image he had to create in order to guide them effectively, that chapter is now closed.

It takes a lot of effort on the side of the guru to accept the weaknesses, difficulties, pain, suffering, karmas and samskaras of the people who have made him their guru. After having put forth this effort for such a long time, the guru then has to follow a certain lifestyle where he is able to discharge the accumulation of those influences, to eliminate the influences of the ideas that have been imposed upon him.

That role of Sri Swamiji as guru stopped the day he surrendered his guru robes before his ishta devata at Tryambakeshwar. Sri Swamiji has said very clearly in many of his published writings that with the removal of the guru robes in front of his ishta, he surrendered all and everything, including the karmas and samskaras of everyone that he might have accumulated, at the feet of his ishta devata.

After that he became an *avadhuta*, a person who has now finally renounced the world with all its sensual and sensory attachments. Attachment to the ashram could be considered to be a sensory and sensual attachment. Attachment to the results of the work could also be considered a sensual attachment, providing a sense of fulfilment, happiness, satisfaction and contentment. Therefore, by sensory and sensual, I mean every kind of interaction that one has in the world with other people, and with objects of both an attractive and repulsive nature.

With that act of his at Tryambakeshwar he also surrendered himself, saying, "I am no longer a person who moves by my own will, but am ready to move at your will alone." The guru-disciple relationship, which he carried with him on the psychic plane, was thereupon dissolved. We were linked

with him directly, but when he dissolved himself into his ishta devata, through him we also became linked to his ishta devata.

Sri Swamiji has actually taken us another step forward by saying, “Do not link with me; link with my ishta devata to whom I have surrendered.” I do not know how many of you caught on to this, but instead of being the conductor of your application to his Master, he has connected us, holding us in his hands, directly to his ishta devata. I still consider myself to be a disciple of Sri Swamiji and I am sure ninety-nine percent of his acquaintances, devotees, disciples and *premis*, those who feel love for him, also consider themselves to be his disciples.

Do you know that when this news came out, five swamis from Australia sent back their geru dhotis and malas? They said, “Since he has stopped being a guru, we have also stopped being his disciples.” Different people have different kinds of relationships with their guru. With some it is physical, with some it is moral and ethical, with some it is spiritual, and with some it is a sense of unity. There are many, many levels on which one can have a relationship with one’s guru.

First, you have to decide on which level you want your relationship to be. If it is physical, he has disconnected himself from that. If it is mental, he has disconnected himself from that. If it is moral and ethical, he has disconnected himself from that too. He has said very frankly, “I am not a guru anymore, so do not ask me questions.” He remains in a light mood now, as most of you know.

The second question is, “On what level does he have contact with us and does he still guide us?” This also I have answered. Certainly some guidance is being received, which is also due to the feeling that we have for him. It is a feeling of belonging to him and to the ideals he stood for all that time: his sense of dedication and commitment to his sankalpa, to his guru and ishta devata. Whatever the reason might be, there is definitely some quality that has joined

us to him. As long as we are aware of that quality, there will be continuous growth through the guidance which is being received and which will be received in a cosmic or universal way, by picking up the frequencies that are being transmitted naturally and spontaneously.

There is another way of receiving guidance instead of asking him in meditation, or in our mind or spirit, help him! When a father or mother tries to earn something, it may at first seem selfish to us that they are earning. Only later do we realize that the work they were doing was not for themselves but to maintain continuity and to provide for a better and more beautiful way of life for us and future generations.

In a similar way, what Sri Swamiji is trying to do now may seem very harsh to us: “No visits! Do not talk to me! Do not think of me! Do not try to come and see me!” but in the course of time we will realize that such instructions were necessary in order to give him the freedom to earn whatever he wants to earn, for this will eventually go into our own spiritual bank accounts. That effort, that direction in itself will then become a source of guidance and inspiration for us.

Therefore, every morning and evening, towards the end of your sadhana, meditation or japa, say one sentence, “Oh God, give your darshan to Sri Swamiji, and then through him we will also have your darshan.” That should be the prayer after your sadhana, to make sure of the investment.

The third question, “Is it still okay to direct our mental and emotional energies towards him without disturbing his sadhana?” has also been answered. Yes, you are free to direct it as long as that helps you remain aware of your goal in life, but do not direct it if you are not aware of your goal, because that will be a waste of time. In actual fact, Sri Swamiji has turned off the current that used to flow through his switchboard, so no calls are going in, but our connection is still plugged in. We keep on dialling from our end and we still have that click, click of the electronic exchange, but his switchboard is turned off.

If you try to force the connection out of some desire or ambition of your own, then he will not receive that communication and it will not be fulfilled. Rather, do something that will help in your own process of growth and sadhana and also help him in his sadhana by praying for him.

Can you talk about the different forms of bhakti?

In bhakti yoga, a devotee can have many different relationships with God. One is *sakhya bhava*, the relationship that exists between friends. Another is *matri bhava*, the relationship between mother and child. Another is *dasya bhava*, the relationship between a master and servant. There is also *vaira bhava*, the relationship based on hate.

There have been many bhakti yogis. Yashoda, the mother of Krishna, and Kaushalya, the mother of Rama, developed *matri bhava*, a relationship with God in the form of mother and child. Suddama, a companion of Krishna, developed *sakhya bhava*, the relationship between friends. Radha, the consort of Krishna developed *madhurya bhava*. Kansa, Krishna's maternal uncle, developed *vaira bhava*, the relationship of hate and animosity. You may wonder how hate and animosity become part of bhakti. If you dislike somebody intensely from the depth of your heart, what do you do? You think about that person all the time. Kansa was obsessed by the prophecy that Krishna, the eighth son of Vasudev, was going to kill him. He would even see Krishna in dreams. His thoughts never left Krishna. Similarly, Ravana's thoughts of hate for Rama never left him; they were fixed and one-pointed.

Of course, if you want to develop *vaira bhava* with God, then you have to become either Ravana or Kansa because for each *bhava* you need to have the corresponding mentality. I am Swami Niranjan, so the *bhava* which is applicable to me is going to be different. I am not Ravana or Kansa. My *bhava*, my relationship, will be according to the life that I lead, which is that of a disciple. For me it will be *dasya bhava*,

master and servant. I am given an order, I do it. If I do not get an order then I use my brains and do it. In this way, different kinds of relationships can take place according to the personality of the devotee.

Mirabai, one of the great women saints, had a relationship of love. This love was so intense at the time of her death that her entire being merged with the statue of Krishna. The love transformed her physical body into energy, which merged with the statue. The same thing happened with Chaitanya Mahaprabhu who was a very great bhakta from Bengal. The story is that even his body became one with the image of Lord Jagannath, in Puri. He had the same relationship as Mirabai. So, we can develop a relationship according to our tendencies or personality.

However, the best description of a relationship that I have come across anywhere in my life is the one between Hanuman and Rama. Somebody once asked Hanuman, "What is your relationship with Rama?" The answer that he gave is a very beautiful one, "Physically, I am the servant of my master. Mentally, my master is my friend. Spiritually, my master and I are one."

This description is applicable to each one of us, because if you believe that, "Physically I am a servant," then what is the form of your ego at that level, does it exist or not? When the idea comes, "No, God is the master and I simply follow his command", then the ego does not exist; there is no role for the ego in a relationship between master and servant. Mentally, when you think, "He and I are friends", what does it mean? It means that he is somebody in whom we are able to confide without any distinction or barrier.

Therefore, all the differences disappear. There is no hate, there is not even love. There is no anger, there is not even affection in the sense that we usually understand. No, there is just openness, an open communication without any conditionings or walls in between. That feeling of freedom, *swatantrata*, that feeling of openness, is the quality of friendship. When you have this clear and free personality,

which is free from ego, then at the spiritual level there is no difference between the two. You are what God is and God is what you are.

If anyone tries to follow bhakti yoga then this is the best relationship that I can recommend. Move from one stage to the next, starting from the physical level. Be a servant, not intellectually, not physically but in your entire being, develop the qualities of a person who follows the mandate, the command of the master, "Let thy will be done." This in itself is a very great sadhana and form of living.

Traditionally, it is believed that God is one, and that God directs everything in life, in creation and so forth. This concept is all right when you are experiencing advaita, when your consciousness has evolved to that level where you can actually experience the oneness of creation and yourself with God.

Unfortunately, advaita is not an intellectual philosophy, because the moment the intellect comes in, you are not able to experience the unifying aspect of life. Therefore, many times we become confused as to what God and the role of God is in our lives. These are eternal questions which people have been asking throughout the ages.

Let us consider this concept from two different angles, the world and the person. Bhakti is very much a personal affair. Bhakti cannot be taught to other people. Singing kirtan is not bhakti. Repeating a mantra is not bhakti. According to many, they may be external forms of bhakti, but real bhakti is a personal experience of oneness with the divine nature. However, the world representing maya, on the other hand, is also a very powerful force. The role of bhakti is to move away from the attractions and repulsions of maya, the world. The manifest world represents the changing reality, and the spiritual dimension represents the eternal existence. Therefore, how do you combine the changing reality with eternal existence?

Reality changes. Different people seeing a chameleon at different times of the day will describe it as having different

colours. One person will see it in the morning and say, “I saw a funny brown animal at this spot in the forest.” Another person will say, “No, I have also seen that same animal, but it was not brown, it was green.” Yet another will say, “No, I have also seen it, but it was neither green nor brown; it was grey.”

What each one failed to realize was that they were describing the same chameleon which keeps on changing colour. What is the actual colour of a chameleon? Those three people did not know. What is the actual nature of the manifest world? We do not know. What is the underlying reality of this world? We do not know. We identify with realities that keep on changing according to different environments and conditions.

Eternal existence is the realm of bhakti. It is moving from the world to the experience of eternal existence which is the eventual aim of bhakti in the form of advaita, awareness of one principle everywhere, and the principle of divinity. This divinity can be given different names at different times, whether you see that aspect of divinity in a *sakara*, manifest form, or a *nirakara*, unmanifest form. Hence, devotion always relates to moving away from the influences of the senses, the mind, the attractions and repulsions of the world, to another level where we experience the nature of harmony, bliss, peace, the eternal experience within ourselves.

We can even say that human consciousness has both potentials. Consciousness has the power to interact with the manifest dimension, with the unmanifest dimension and with the transcendental dimension. Consciousness has the power to become omniscient and omnipotent. If we consider consciousness in the form of a scale, then we are on one side where we are experiencing changing realities. We are not able to experience the fullness of consciousness where we eventually begin to experience the states of omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence.

In bhakti, we move along this scale from beginning to end and as we do so, a transformation of the mind occurs. This

enables us to experience the pure nature of the individual in relation to the cosmos. There is a poem by William Blake:

*To see the world in a grain of sand
And heaven in a wild flower;
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour.*

These are the symptoms of one who is a bhakta. So, what is bhakti? Bhakti is being able to experience the macrocosmic consciousness in a microcosmic state. Maya is being overawed by the microcosmic environment. Moving from maya to bhakti is just a progression from one end of the scale to the other. Bhakti means realizing the nature which we hold dear in our lives. That is the meaning of bhakti.

Please explain the importance of charity and how it helps us to evolve spiritually. How can we, who are selfish and materialistic, become more charitable?

A charitable attitude reflects a very pure quality of life, and it comes combined with transcendental qualities. In English, the word ‘charity’ means to give. In Sanskrit, it has a different meaning. I will explain it through a short story.

Once, a group made up of gods, demons and human beings went to the Creator to ask for guidelines so they could live their lives in completeness and fullness. The Creator uttered only one syllable, *da*, and said, “*Da* is the mantra to give happiness in life.”

The humans, being very self-oriented people, involved with their ambitions and desires, and in fulfilling their personal needs, considered the mantra *da* to mean *daan* or charity, through which they could overcome their selfishness and self-centredness.

As we know, gods tend to live in a dimension where there is only enjoyment and happiness, so they took the mantra to mean *daman* or restraint of the senses, saying, “We live in a world of happiness and enjoyment, but let us not go overboard. Let us maintain restraint of the senses

and mind, and not fall prey to the negative effects of pleasure.”

The demons, who are the destructive beings, decided that *da* meant *daya* or compassion. They said, “Destruction is our nature. If we want to attain fulfilment and happiness in life, then we should become compassionate instead of giving pain and suffering to other people.”

In this way, these three groups each gave a different meaning to the original syllable which the Creator had given to them. If we analyze the mantra *da*, which can mean restraint, compassion or charity, we will find that these three qualities are linked. Definitely, as human beings, we are attracted towards pleasures, and tend to ignore the needs, lifestyles and aspirations of other beings. We become indispensable to ourselves. We have also experienced the destructive quality in life, which is a very reactive quality of our nature.

The demonic force within us is *tamas*. The desire for pleasure is *rajas*. We have to change these two natures. The moment we are able to change the demonic, negative force within us, we become compassionate. The negative force is not only projected outside towards other people, but also inside towards ourselves. We are destroying our own lives by wrong thinking, acting and behaviour. We are not able to find the centre, balance and harmony in life so we destroy ourselves in the quest for power. This is a tamasic quality which can be overcome by the force of compassion.

Compassion has to be understood in its broad, not in its limited aspect. It is a very special quality. I would even say that compassion is the quality of a person who is awakened internally. All our thoughts of compassion are motivated by one idea, concept, belief, situation and condition; every expression of our life is coloured by our own egos, desires and ambitions. If compassion is coloured by ego, ambition and desire, can it remain pure? Can compassion be experienced as pure compassion? No, compassion is always a quality of a person who is awakened.

The force of rajas, the desire or craving for satisfaction, fulfilment and pleasure has to be balanced by restraint of the senses and mind. This ability to restrain the senses and mind leads us to another dimension where an adjustment is made with life.

A few days ago, when I was in Deoghar, Sri Swamiji was asked about pain, suffering and happiness. He said, "Look, there is no satisfaction of happiness in the world. The reality of the world is pain and suffering. You cannot avoid pain and suffering at all, but if you can adjust to and accommodate with pain and suffering without struggling and fighting with it, you will attain happiness." I took what he said to mean that happiness or pleasure is just acceptance and adjustment to pain and suffering.

If we analyze this concept in relation to our own lives, we will find it to be true. The moment we adjust to our pain and suffering, we feel that we have become happy, that we have attained a state of comfort and we feel good about it: "I have overcome my pain." We have not actually overcome the pain; we have simply adjusted to it. It no longer has any negative effect upon us. This adjustment will only take place if there is restraint, when we are able to control, direct and tame the wild nature of the senses and mind. Yogic philosophy is based on the restraint of the senses and mind, especially pratyahara and dharana which teach us how to observe and harmonize the actions and reactions of the senses and mind.

The natural outcome of restraint is charity. Charity does not mean to give indiscriminately. Charity means to help a person change his lifestyle and mentality. If I give a beggar one thousand rupees, I think that I have performed an act of charity, but is it really an act of charity? With those one thousand rupees he may go to the Munger pub and drink away the money in one night. Or he may go to the brothel and spend the money there. Or he might pick a fight and lose the money. Then how has my one thousand rupees helped that beggar? It has not helped in any way. Two days

later the same person will be back at the same spot asking for more. This cannot be the meaning of charity. Charity must provide an opportunity for a person to change the limiting and restricting patterns of their life, evolve into something new, and be more comfortable and at ease with the struggles of life.

Therefore, you must not look only to the need of the individual, but to make a long-term plan to help them. For example, Sivananda Math is a charitable institution. Charity is defined as the act of giving, but does that mean that we go around distributing money, food and clothes to people indiscriminately? No. When it comes to spending, the institution thinks very carefully so that people will be uplifted by the expenditure in the long run. If we provide shelter, employment or education, how will that help people? Will it improve their lifestyle or not? There is a long stream of thinking before any decision is made. We are not just a social service organization with a board outside saying, 'Aid granted here'. There are many organizations in the world that have done that, and we do not want to fall into that category. Hence we have to define charity in a different way.

Of course, in times of need, calamity and disaster, the act of charity will be different. In 1988 there was a drought in Munger. The water table had dropped right down, and there was absolutely no water in the town. The government asked us to help. The swamis from the ashram went out into the streets, and with bamboo technology dug tube wells. Within twenty days we had dug forty tube wells, to a depth of about 80 to 120 feet. That is also charity, but it is emergency charity.

There was a fire in a village in Lakshmipur which razed the village to the ground. Boatloads of grain, clothes and medicines went to that village and were distributed by swamis and volunteers in order to help the villagers overcome their immediate needs. That is emergency charity, but emergency charity does not have the same meaning as charity with a capital 'C'.

If you want to develop a charitable nature you must have the ability to assess the needs of another individual on a long-term basis, not on a short-term basis. You should be able to project yourself to see the future of that person, at least partly. You should be able to visualize how their life is going to evolve and in that process of evolution, what their most immediate need is, whether it is for education, employment, shelter, or other forms of social or financial help, makes no difference. Therefore, charity can be defined as understanding the need of another person and acting accordingly.

Can you talk about the role of bhakti in our life?

A long time ago, in the 1970s, I asked Sri Swamiji, “What is the role of bhakti?” He said, “Don’t ask me now because I have not experienced it. You will get the answer in the future.” Now, thinking about it, I have that answer, for when I see Sri Swamiji I feel that bhakti is something which cannot be explained intellectually; it has to be lived and experienced. We cannot experience bhakti in our lives. We still have too many samskaras, desires, ambitions and karmas that we need to fulfil. If we think of bhakti along with our samskaras and karmas, ambitions and desires, likes and dislikes, then the pure concept of bhakti cannot be understood.

The meaning of bhakti changes. Christ had a relationship with God wherein he saw himself as the son and God as the Father. That is a very intimate relationship. We cannot say, “I am the son, and God is the Father”, because we do not have that level of understanding and experience. Sri Swamiji says that for him the relationship is that of a master and a servant, where God is the master and he is the servant. He has no choice. It is a unique relationship which can develop only after the purity of bhakti, *shuddha bhakti*, is realized.

Normally, when we perform bhakti, we are the master and God is the slave. We pray, “Please do this for me.” “Help me.” “Fulfil my desires.” Of course, we add another

sentence to our prayers, “Fulfil my desires and then I will do your bidding.” “Help me so that I can help you.” We tend to adopt the role of master, and make God into our servant and slave.

People think that this is bhakti, but it definitely is not; rather, it is a manipulation of bhakti. Why do we ask God to help us? We are suffering and we do not accept that suffering because we want to experience happiness and pleasure. It is with a desire, an ambition for happiness, pleasure and contentment, that we request God to help us. We follow the path of bhakti just for personal gratification and satisfaction. Therefore, we can never attain it in our lifetime.

The mystics and saints never prayed for gratification of their personal desires or ambitions. If their personal ambitions have been fulfilled at all, it is because God wanted them to be fulfilled. People in the world cannot practise the higher form of bhakti. One who practises the higher form of bhakti does not belong to this world. When Saint Theresa of Avila used to go into inner ecstasy, the stigmata would appear on her hands. What kind of communion was that? Can we have that experience in our present condition? No, we can neither live bhakti nor practise bhakti. When Ramakrishna Paramahansa used to communicate with the Divine Mother, he would lose body consciousness totally and people would call him a madman. Can we lose body consciousness? No, we believe that people will think we are crazy if we start to dance. We do not have that depth of experience of bhakti.

In the life of Christ and other saints, bhakti was a very deep inner experience. Therefore, do not think that you are qualified to practise bhakti because you have seen Sri Swamiji. You have not reached that level of maturity. Maybe after thorough preparation, having exhausted our external links and attachments, we can begin to experience that depth of bhakti, but right now it is not possible. What is possible, however, is preparing ourselves to experience bhakti.

Bhakti is the last stage of yoga. Yoga is generally defined as union, and the highest form of union is between the

individual being and the higher being, but can this union between the individual and the higher being take place without one's life being transformed? The answer is, "No." Can the union between the individual being and the higher being remain only a meditative process? No, for that to happen we have to go through the different layers of our personality.

In the Bible, Ezekiel had a vision of seven veils and he opened these one at a time. These seven veils are the curtains of the chakras. Each chakra has a curtain, a covering that does not allow the divine light to shine through. That light is definitely shining, but it is behind the seven curtains: mooladhara curtain, our sensuality and our insecurities; swadhisthana curtain, our fears and inhibitions; manipura curtain, our aggression and conditioned feelings in relation to family, friends. These different curtains have to be opened, and the way to do this is through the process of yoga, starting with the pains, diseases and imbalances of the body. After harmonizing the body, we have to work on the mental plane to remove the imbalances and diseases of the mind, intellect, emotions, intuitive awareness, and even the psyche. They all represent levels which, when attained, will open the curtain of a chakra.

Therefore, in order to experience the final state of bhakti, we have to go through the process of yoga. Sri Swamiji has said very clearly, for the benefit of everyone, "For those who want to identify with my mission, with what I am trying to give to people, the point of identification is yoga." Not jnana yoga, not even bhakti yoga. Jnana becomes a head-trip, and bhakti becomes a fluctuating, flirtatious experience. Between the flirtation of bhakti and the heart, and the head-trips of jnana and power, where does the individual stand?

Sri Swamiji has made it very clear that unless you have gone through the different stages of yoga, you should not attempt to experience higher bhakti. It will not work out, and it is also possible to lose your mind. If you try to inflate

a bicycle tyre with the same amount of air required for a car tyre, what will happen? It will burst. In order to put 26 lbs of air pressure in a tyre, it is necessary to have the appropriate tyre, and 26 lbs of air pressure in a bicycle tyre is not going to work out.

Once Sri Swamiji was asked, “Is it possible to become realized in one lifetime?” He replied, “No, it is not possible.” He was again asked, “But we come to yoga, or we go to religion or other mystical systems in the hope that we will become enlightened.” Sri Swamiji answered, “Yes, what you are saying is correct, but you have to understand one thing. The body has limitations, the mind has limitations, and enlightenment is a transcendental experience. This transcendental experience cannot be had with a non-transcendental mind and body.” Therefore, what must be done? We have to change the quality of the body and mind and make them transcendental before that experience can manifest.

The purpose of yoga or other mystical systems – tantra, Vedanta, Samkhya or whatever – is to prepare the body and mind of an individual by helping to change the quality of their nature. Therefore, the aim of yoga is preparation. The final result is natural and spontaneous. We suffer from a disease and we start doing some practices. We start following a discipline to overcome the disease and we continue to practise regularly. When the disease is eradicated we stop the treatment. The mind, the environment and the feelings are diseased, and we have to treat them. Do not think of health without undergoing treatment. Do not think of bhakti without undergoing the treatment of yoga. Do not think of God until you can handle your own mind.

Can you tell us about the nine forms of bhakti?

Bhakti is a term used externally to define something beyond the range of maya, of linear thinking, it is not devotion. It may be translated and defined as devotion in the absence of any other description or word, but bhakti is definitely not

devotion, or contemplation of God. Bhakti means coming closer to the essence of the Self.

Let us look at the nine steps of bhakti, not from a mystical angle, but from a practical one. The final aim of bhakti is the merger of consciousness with the divine presence. That is known as *sayujya*, merger, fusion or union, but before we come to this stage, there are other stages of bhakti that act at the deeper level of mind to transform the mental structure and conditioning. In the *Bhagavad Gita* there are different definitions of bhakti. In the *Ramayana* the definition is different again. The words are different, but the state of experience is the same.

The first form of bhakti which Sri Swamiji has spoken about, and which is along the lines of the *Ramayana*, is being in the company of truth, *satsang*. This can be understood in different ways. Being near a saintly person and having their satsang, instruction and guidance is one form of bhakti. Another form of the same bhakti is analyzing truth and spiritual life; but whatever the state, the main emphasis is being in the company of truth. If we define this psychologically, truth represents a quality which is gained after attaining viveka. If there is no discernment, there can be no discovery of truth. In order to experience truth, one needs to have the power of discrimination, or *viveka*. How can we attain this?

A sadhana is required, whether it is being in the company of an enlightened person, absorbing his or her vibrations and allowing the inner mind to experience it, or whether it is self-analysis, trying to develop the faculty of discernment through a meditative process or way of life. According to their own level of consciousness, everyone has to give their definition of satsang, or being in the company of truth.

The second form of bhakti is, in colloquial language, listening to *lilas*, or stories of divine beings. If we think with our rational mind, then these lilas can help inspire us to accept a different lifestyle, mentality and mode of behaviour. However, they also have a psychological meaning. It is the

nature of the mind to involve itself in constant gossip and criticism. The moment you stop your mind from gossiping and criticising, it becomes calm, peaceful and fixed. It begins to experience a different kind of personal nature, which is not attracted to the world of senses and objects. That is the experience of *shoonyata*, the quality of the void, an awareness of the manifestation of a different quality.

We go one step further in our inner transformation to an awareness of qualities which are not yet manifesting, rising above the influence of ego and identity, of 'mine' and 'I', because normally we identify with our thoughts, actions, beliefs, ambitions, ego, the world, family and society. Identification is not bad, but the moment we become indispensable in the process of identification, then the ego becomes very powerful. If I begin to think that I am indispensable then my downfall has begun. I have become even more caught up in the grip of my ego, in the identity of 'mineness'.

The third form of bhakti is *amaan*, becoming egoless. In order to be egoless it is necessary to have vairagya: to be in the world, but not of it. In fact, the entire philosophy of the *Bhagavad Gita* is based on this very principle: do what you have to do, fulfil your dharma, carry out your obligations, but do not think that you are indispensable. Do not have any attachment to the results of the actions, because attachment is another way of identifying with the ego. Wherever there is even the slightest inkling of attachment, there is a connection with ego. Possessiveness, desire and ambition are all involved in attachment. To be egoless is to have vairagya, a different vision of life where we are able to experience the state of non-being. I call it non-being in the world of maya.

The fourth form of bhakti is japa. Japa is not the repetition of God's name, or religious and mystical identification. It is not even repetition of a mantra. It is constant remembrance that I, who lives in this body, the individual self, and the Cosmic Self which pervades the entire universe, are one. In japa, the essence has to be

realized. A raindrop and water in the river or ocean are two different things, but they are composed of the same essence or matter. If the raindrop thinks “I am a raindrop and am not of the same essence as water”, then there is a difference. Japa is the process of identifying with the divine or cosmic nature. It is a method by which a person who has attained viveka and vairagya can disassociate the individual self from the manifest dimension and link with the cosmic dimension.

However, in order to come to this level of japa, we have to begin with a mantra and a mala, because when we repeat a mantra psychic changes take place. Externally, we feel a sense of happiness, quietness, peace, contentment, and a release of stress, but other symptoms are experienced internally at a deeper psychic level of which we are not aware. They represent the changing of the energies governing the body and mind, the awakening of the pranas in the body and mind. Japa is a process of identification of an individual with the cosmic state: sattwa.

The fifth form of bhakti is incorporating the transcendental, humanitarian and unconditioned qualities into everyday life. The qualities that we express in our lives are conditioned qualities, having restrictions and motivations. The word for ‘quality’ is *guna*. The real language of living is expressing those qualities which are cosmic, divine and human, which are not conditioned, but which are free from every kind of mental or manifest impression.

We talk of affection, love and compassion, but there is always some form of desire and attachment mixed with these, something that we want to gain. These are the conditioned aspects of qualities which can be both material and spiritual. Love is a quality, but it can be positive or negative, sattwic or tamasic. Compassion is a quality, but it also can be positive or negative, sattwic or tamasic. Affection can either take the form of attachment or universal feeling for everyone, which is free from inner animosity. When one is free from the attractions and repulsions of life, then love is experienced.

Removing the conditionings which we have created in the expression of a quality is the fifth form of bhakti.

The sixth form of bhakti is manifesting the divine and human qualities in one's life while following one's dharma. I think that this is the most important aspect of bhakti. Generally, when we live by a quality in our life, we tend to isolate ourselves from the dharma belonging to the realm of the body, mind and emotions, and also from the dharma governing the spiritual dimension.

Krishna had the ability to live life according to dharma. Mythological or historical, whatever the story is, whatever his lifestyle was, his whole life process was lived according to dharma. In the process he had to adopt many roles, but he was never caught up in any one role. He was a warrior, but he did not have animosity for anyone. He was a lover, but he was not attached to anyone. He was a playmate, a friend, but friendships did not interfere with his pursuit of dharma. He always had a clear vision and lived life according to the dharma of the moment.

It sounds easy, but we find it very difficult to combine the principles of spirituality and awareness with the normal, external environment and lifestyle. At times the thought comes into our minds, "I am going into isolation, to an ashram, to a guru, to a mountain, into solitude." Different kinds of thoughts may come, such as, "To hell with the family, to hell with society, I want my space!" It is all right to look for one's space and have time off, but why reject the environment or certain situations? Instead of feeling that rejection and repulsion inside, instead of identifying with a personal desire, live life from moment to moment by accepting situations as they come up, and follow your dharma accordingly. Awareness of dharma, and living according to dharma, must happen once you are able to live with qualities which are spiritual, transcendental, unconditioned, human and divine.

The seventh form of bhakti is seeing the spark of life and divinity in each and everyone. There should be no distinction

between one person and another, no concept of high and low, but only identification with all. Just as I can identify with God up there, I should be able to identify with God down here, in you, in me, and in the different forms of creation.

There is a tradition in India that once in a lifetime people who are God-fearing, sadhus and sannyasins, have to take water from Gangotri, the source of the Ganga, and carry it on their shoulders in pots without putting it down on the ground anywhere along the way. They walk to Rameshwaram, where Lord Rama is believed to have made the Shivalingam out of sand, and offer the water there. It is thought that by doing so, one can attain realization. Saint Tukaram once made this arduous journey from Gangotri to Rameshwaram. Just as he was about to enter the gates of the temple, he saw a donkey, totally dehydrated and in need of water. There were thousands of pilgrims, but nobody was paying any attention to the poor donkey. Saint Tukaram said, "The donkey also is my Lord," and gave the suffering animal the water.

Now, what merit he acquired we do not know, but from the story it can be gathered that he saw his Lord in the creation around him. He was not a self-centred person. He did not say, "I have brought this water to put on the Shivalingam in the temple. Let the donkey die, he is suffering his karma." We may think that the donkey was suffering his karma, but he did not think like that. Seeing the aspect of divinity experienced within oneself, within other beings, whether animate or inanimate, is the highest form of compassion, where the individual self is totally eradicated – kaput! Then you are God and everything is God. The same light that shines in you, shines everywhere.

The eighth form of bhakti is contentment, not seeing faults in other beings. There is a saying by Sant Kabir, "I have searched the whole world to find a crooked person, but now I realize there is no one more crooked than I." One who does not struggle or fight, who does not see any kind of fault in other people, but who lives and flows with life, is content. After all, who is at fault? You are expressing yourself

according to your level of evolution; I am expressing myself according to my level of evolution.

Grass is small, trees are tall. Is it the fault of the grass that it is smaller than the tree? Is it the fault of the tree that it is taller than the grass? No. There is a natural law governing each and every being, each and every blade of grass, and we all express ourselves according to that natural law. If there is acceptance of the natural law then there will be no criticism. Of course, one has to strive to uphold dharma because that is also a level of bhakti. Krishna could have sat quietly and said, “Everyone is following their law, let the Pandavas do their thing, let the Kauravas do their thing”, but he followed his dharma with happiness and contentment. He never criticized anyone.

The ninth form of bhakti is *atmanivedana*, total surrender, total fusion or merger. *Atma* means self and *nivedan* means to offer. It happens when even the last vestige of individual identity is dissolved in cosmic awareness. It can occur physically too. As you go through the different processes of bhakti, it is not only the mind which evolves, but also the body. Each and every atom of the body becomes enlightened and the atoms dissolve into the environment. Kabir was the guru of both Hindus and Muslims. When he died, the Hindus wanted to cremate him but the Muslims wanted to bury him, so they started to fight. However, when they removed the cloth which was covering his body, they found only flowers, and both communities shared the flowers, half-half.

I do not think this is mere spiritual fantasy. If it were only spiritual fantasy it would go against every kind of spiritual theory, especially the theory of enlightenment. When you feel hungry, is it the body or the mind that feels hungry? When you fill your stomach, is only the body fulfilled or is the mind fulfilled also? It is a linked experience. Similarly, even in the state of enlightenment, there is not only transformation of the mind, or expansion of consciousness, but also enlightenment of the body. At that level, the body becomes

God. Consciousness is God, but the body also becomes God and dissolves. In maya the body is animalistic, prey to the influence of the instincts. In bhakti, the body becomes God, experiencing cosmic unity.

Atmanivedana is not that easy to attain. You cannot fill your stomach just by thinking about food; you cannot quench your thirst just by thinking about water. There is a whole process involved. Even if there is water in a glass, you need to take hold of it, lift it up, and bring it to your lips. Atmanivedana is definitely not something which one can attain just by thinking about or aspiring for it. However, if faith becomes powerful and takes you to that real experience of atmanivedana, you will cease to be of this world. If you stand under the shower with your clothes on and hope that only your body will get wet, it will not work out. You will be drenched all over. It is the same with atmanivedan.

In our lifetime we may only fulfil one of the nine requirements of bhakti, such as having discrimination, but the power of discrimination can take us to the final stage in one moment. You have to remember that bhakti does not follow a linear path. Nine stages have been defined, but each stage is connected to the final one, they are not connected to each other. The first stage is connected to the ninth, the second stage is connected to the ninth, the third stage is connected to the ninth, and so on. Wherever you are on the path, if you are able to live that stage fully then you are bound to reach the ninth stage. Just live one stage fully and you will bypass every other stage.

Sri Swamiji said during darshan that the relationship between God and man is that of master and servant. We can relate this to the guru and disciple relationship. Please enlarge on the concept of master and servant in our ashram and spiritual life.

It is not right to speak of a master and servant relationship in the context of either the ashram environment or the guru and disciple relationship. Generally, because of our

intellectual understanding, the idea of master and servant creates an image in our mind that is not applicable here. In an ashram the energy can be that of the guru, but the feeling and environment has to be that of a co-creator where everyone has the same status and is expected to fulfil the duties of a co-creator. I cannot manage the ashram by myself. It is all of us together who manage the ashram and create the atmosphere. It is the cooperation, good will and open communication between us that helps maintain the ashram spirit.

At the spiritual level, the energy of the guru is the point of focus for all of us in an ashram. We focus our energy there. Sri Swamiji may focus his energy on and derive his energy from his guru, Swami Sivananda. We may focus our energy and derive our energy from our guru, Swami Satyananda. My disciples may focus their energy on and derive their energy from me. After all, everyone needs to focus and derive their energy from some point. That focusing and pulling of energy happens at a psychic and spiritual level. It is the affair of every individual, but in an ashram environment we are all co-creators and are equally important; there is no distinction.

The relationship between guru and disciple is always one of the heart. The heart has to experience the relationship, not the mind. This is one thing you have to learn, either as a guru or as a disciple. Do not allow the mind stuff to percolate down to the heart, because if it does there will be a mess. Do not allow the heart stuff to affect the normal functioning of the mind because if it does there will be another mess.

We have to make a conscious effort to retain the experiences of the head in the head, and the experiences of the heart in the heart. In external affairs, use the faculties of the head, but in the spiritual environment, in the relationship between guru and disciple, use the faculties of the heart. This is the testing or training ground of every disciple and guru. We must identify with the purity of the heart and not with the complexity of the mind. Both have their roles and both have to be worked through at their own level.

When we have attained a clean head and heart, a state of union is experienced between the guru and ourselves. Externally, I am a servant to my guru, following his commands and using my creativity to fulfil those commands. Mentally, my guru is my friend and guide, one with whom I can relate at an intellectual level, at an emotional level, at the level of feelings, at the level of faith, at the level of trust, and at the level of conviction. He or she is definitely my friend.

Spiritually, there is no difference between a guru and a disciple – they are one. There is no difference between my guru and me – we are one. If you are relating to your guru externally then let him be the ruthless master and you the obedient servant. If you identify with the guru at a subtle level let him be your most intimate friend who guides you every step of the way. If you can identify in a deeper, spiritual way, then let there be no difference between you and the guru. But please remember that you have to be able to identify with the guru at different levels. It does not mean that you start thinking, “I am Swami Satyananda”, and start behaving foolishly. The feeling of oneness has to be there. You cannot say, “We are one.” and yet maintain your idiosyncrasies of mind and behaviour.

What happens when two flames merge into each other? There is no difference between them. In the same way, there is no difference when one spirit merges with another, because individuality is lost. I become the guru, the guru becomes me. I experience the same condition and state as the guru, and the guru experiences the same condition and state as me. This is the most difficult part, but definitely we can begin to accept the relationship on a subtle level as one of friendship. Then it becomes more fulfilling and enriching.

When this merger or union is taking place, whether it is between a disciple and their guru or between a person and God, they have to remember that, although the spirit has become one, the bodies are different. You may begin to experience the divine spirit, but still you are subject to the laws and karmas of your physical body and mind. Despite your best

efforts, the body will need to fulfil its karmas; the mind will need to fulfil its role in life. Even self-realized beings have the need to eat and sleep, to give vent to their mental expressions, sometimes in isolation, sometimes in public. Sometimes the mind has to follow its own nature and karma.

The concept of master and servant comes automatically and spontaneously into the life of an evolved being. Here, master means the spirit with which we have united ourselves and which continues to guide our destiny. It means the person who has the overall picture, the vision of what is going to take place. This body and mind, both with their limitations, follow the will of the spirit. This is the concept of “Let Thy will be done.”

Two things are implied here. First, I am aware of ‘Thy will’, I have come to know what it is, and I accept the concept of “Let thy will be done.” I have no opinions of my own in relation to it. I am in tune with the divine will. Second, I can ask, “Make me a capable instrument so I can become your servant, so I can become the bamboo which will be hollowed out from inside.”

There is a beautiful story from the life of Radha and Krishna. Radha once said to Krishna, “You love your flute more than me”, to which Krishna replied, “Yes, I do, because this flute is absolutely hollow inside. There is nothing in it, so I can fill it with a divine melody to be enjoyed by everyone who hears it.” The flute is the servant, not the master. The flute does not play itself; the master has to play the flute. In order to become the flute you have to become empty from inside. Do not allow your head-stuff or your heart-stuff to come in the way. This is the final stage where even the heart has to be transcended. We all know that we have to make an effort to go beyond our heads, but there comes a time when even the heart has to be transcended.

When the heart is transcended, only then can we truly understand the master and servant relationship that takes place with the fusion of two spirits. A musician breaks off a piece of bamboo, takes it home and then works for many

days to hollow it out, removing all the unnecessary pieces from inside and making holes in it. Then, when the piece of bamboo is absolutely clean inside, it can be played and sweet music will come out of it. Therefore, another trick of bhakti yoga is learning how to become hollow from inside. This hollowness does not mean the absence of individuality or the individual personality; this emptiness is the outcome of having shed the unnecessary items in order to experience the divine melody flowing through the personality.

What should my relationship with my guru be, and how can I develop it?

Many different types of guru-disciple relationship have been defined. Practically, it is important to believe in only one kind of relationship and that is a heart-to-heart relationship. If you can follow that one, then you do not have to worry about any others. In order to develop a heart-to-heart relationship, it is important that you first of all become aware of your own idiosyncrasies and nature. Speaking from personal and practical experience, I have seen that disciples either make their guru into a rubbish bin and expect him to become a miracle worker, or they want him to be the epitome of morality and spirituality, or they make him into a cardboard person. I do not agree with any of this.

The guru is not a person on whom you can dump all your rubbish. The guru is one who inspires you to lead your life in a creative, efficient and effective way, so that there is development of self-awareness: what can I achieve, what are my limitations, what is the right thing to do, what is the wrong thing to do, how can I understand other people's attitudes and concepts and not impose my own ego and ambitions? The teaching of the guru is based on this. Definitely there are problems in life, but you have to find your own solutions.

When I first came to the ashram Sri Swamiji told me, "Look, never come to me with your problems. If you have a problem, difficulty or conflict, work it out yourself. Find out

different solutions and then bring them to me. Once you have told me what your solutions are, I will decide which one is the right one for you to adopt or follow.” I became aware of the problems and difficulties that I faced in relationships, work, communication, interactions, my emotions, and mind. I would then think of different solutions for working them out. Afterwards, I would go to Sri Swamiji and say, “Swamiji, I have this problem and these are the solutions I have thought of: A, B, C, D, E, F, G.” He would say, “Follow F”, and I would follow F. It was as simple as that.

This type of relationship is important. People come to me with their problems, but they do not implement the solutions I give them. Their nature, ego, desires and ambitions come in the way, and they tell me, “No, I can’t do it. Find me another solution.” I do not agree with that way of behaving. If I say to people, “Well, you think of what the solution could be”, they think according to their tendencies and traits, ignoring many other important factors. Then without any discussion, they implement it, and it can go wrong. Thus, in any relationship with the guru, it is the solution which has to be discussed, not just the problem. The solutions are your own product according to your capacities, nature and beliefs. The guru simply channels them. There is never any conflict between the guru and the disciple. This is how a heart-to-heart relationship eventually develops.

There are two more important points. The first is that one must recognize the fact that their guru is human. Disciples don’t recognize that their guru is human. In his personal life, the guru can be an enlightened being; he can be the epitome of spirituality and morality; he can be an idiot; he can be a madman externally; he can be anything, because the attainment is different in every individual and does not follow a set pattern. According to their personality, each guru evolves and develops a method of practice, a lifestyle, and a way of seeing things. Each one is unique. You have to recognize and understand that the guru is human, only then can you develop a proper relationship with the guru.

Last month, a lady from Varanasi attended the Health Management Course conducted at the Bihar School of Yoga. Varanasi is a city of gurus where every Tom, Dick and Harry is a guru. After staying here for fifteen days, she wrote me a letter saying, “You don’t fit any of the categories of guru. Who are you?” So I answered her by saying that I am not a guru, I am a teacher of people, and as long as my guru is alive I can’t be a guru.

Your image of a guru is generally that of a fat person with a long flowing beard and hair who sits on a high pedestal with twenty people running around at his beck and call. That is not our tradition; we do not relate to that concept of guruhood. Guruhood is not a status symbol, nor is it a lifestyle which feeds the ego. True guruhood is learning how to do seva, not how to get seva done. This is something that some people will find very difficult to understand because of the modern influence and image of gurus, but the tradition is very clear about it. The tradition says that the guru has to be a human being. If the guru cannot be a human being with the same joys, affections, passions and frustrations in life as other human beings, then he is not a guru.

There is a story from the life of Kabir Das, one of the great saints of India. He went to the Kumbha Mela and there he was asked, “Can you identify an actual realized being, an actual guru, in this huge gathering of people?” Kabir Das said, “I will try.” He took up a stick and hit a so-called guru. The guru was furious, “How dare you hit me!” Kabir Das said, “He is not the right one.” He hit another guru. The disciples became furious and bashed Kabir Das up. Their guru did not bat an eyelid, and Kabir Das said, “He is also not the right one.” For the duration of this famed Kumbha Mela, Kabir Das was out hitting gurus. Ultimately, he found one who, after being hit by Kabir Das, said, “Sit down, my dear boy, your hand must be in pain. I can also imagine the pain you must be feeling. Let me just massage you and give you relief from the pain you have felt from hitting me.” Kabir Das said, “He is the right one! He is an actual realized being.”

The relationship between guru and disciple has to be an open one. Human beings have a very peculiar trait of saying one thing and doing another. They say that guru is God, father, mother, brother, sister, husband, wife and friend. On the one hand, they invite their guru to be everything, and, on the other, they hide many things from the guru. There is rejection as well as acceptance. They hide many of their actions and beliefs, and if the guru does not fit their conditions he becomes a bad person in their eyes.

Such people are total failures in life, because something else that the guru teaches us is to act according to our beliefs with openness, frankness, and clarity of mind. If you cannot understand that then you have no right to claim that you are a disciple. Discipleship is much more difficult than guruhood or guruship, because the training of opening up, of realizing one's nature, takes place when you are a student, a disciple. The relationship between guru and disciple is an intimate one. Therefore, as Sri Swamiji says, between the two, life has to be an open book. You may close your book of life with other people, but not with the guru.

**How can we develop our connection or link with the guru?
How necessary is it to live in his presence?**

The real connection between guru and disciple is the feeling and respect which the aspirant has for the guru. You have to look beyond your conceived impressions, ideas and feelings in order to truly connect with the guru, to respect what the guru does to change your pattern of life. If real feeling and respect are there, then the connection with the guru is felt all the time. Even if you are thousands of miles away, you do not feel a vacuum, emptiness or absence of a link, guidance or support.

I have lived with Sri Swamiji for a very short period of my life. I left his side when I was eleven years old and stayed away from him until I was twenty-two. In between I only saw him a couple of times and stayed with him for only a few months. There were times when I did not see him at all for five or

six years, and I never missed him. Later on I wondered why, because here in the ashram I saw people coming with hopes of living close to a master and they would try to see him every day, even if only for a short time, just a glimpse, if not a chat or a discussion or a lecture. Just a glimpse was enough for them. But that seemed to me like an imposed attachment by the disciple in relation to the guru. I could never understand it because I had never experienced it.

Not only that, I was very critical of Sri Swamiji because he had given me freedom. When I was leaving India, he said, "Look, you are going abroad. I don't want to hold you as a sannyasin. If you want to live overseas, get married, study, work, you have my permission. I won't stop you." That really went deep inside me. I thought to myself, "This person is giving me total freedom to lead my life as I want." He is not saying, "Look, if you don't behave yourself I will call you back, take off your geru and disrobe you." There was nothing like that.

I analyzed him critically over a period of years. I came in contact with many great gurus, famous ones, realized ones, and I always used to compare them with Sri Swamiji. I found that there were certain qualities in Sri Swamiji which attracted me, which I aspired to attain, and which became the aim in my life. I did not feel his absence at all, not even for a day. Now I attribute that to being able to accept my circumstances, my company, my life and my environment. There was no struggle. When we are not able to accept our environment, company and situation, then we encounter difficulties with ourselves.

I did not experience any loss of a link. I must have had some very good previous karmas or samskaras, not to have had to go through that stage of attachment and desiring to run to the person I liked. It is due to my good karma and I am very happy about it. In this stage, I experienced a very deep inner feeling. No matter what anyone said about Sri Swamiji, my feelings remained unchanged. If somebody said, "Swamiji is a very nice person", I would say, "Yes, he is. There

is no doubt about it. I have seen that niceness in him.” I did not feel elated in any way; rather it confirmed my realization. If somebody said, “Oh, he is such a strict disciplinarian that I left the ashram,” I would say, “Yes, I have seen that in him, but it hasn’t bothered me because I accept that side as well.” This strict disciplinarian nature did not affect me in the negative way that it affected many people.

I have always accepted situations, life, events, environment, people, guru, father, mother and so on. Many times we do not accept the actions, beliefs and thoughts of our father, mother, brothers, sisters and other people. This lack of acceptance is where the problem lies. Aspire to develop a deep inner feeling and respect for life and people. Make sure that these two things are your very personal treasures and do not allow anyone to touch them. Then you will feel the presence of the guru all the time.

After many years of poorna sannyasa life one can become tired of institutional life, and feel mouldy and rusty. When physical communication with one’s guru is becoming increasingly rare, what philosophy, way of thinking, or what attitude can renew that inner drive and inspiration?

There are two ways to answer this question: one is institutionally and the other is personal or human. Institutionally, in the sannyasa tradition it is said that you have to live in an ashram environment for a period of twelve years. After twelve years you leave the ashram and go through the stage of parivrajaka for as long as is necessary in order to attain maturity. Then you settle down and work for the benefit of the community and your own spiritual life.

Once, when people had fewer desires and ambitions, they could spend twelve years in the ashram, attain whatever they needed according to their capacity, and then move out with the blessings of the guru, teacher or master, taking an aim and direction with them. They maintained contact with the ashram, the guru and the guru’s mission. That was the traditional approach.

On a personal level, if I look at the generations of sannyasins who have been through the ashram, from my own generation of the late sixties and seventies, to the present generation, I see a great change in the mentality and behaviour of the sannyasins that have stayed in the ashram. Many times a spontaneous assessment happens in my mind about the kind of life we had and the work we did in the early days, and how today, within the ashram structure, we have to accommodate to the ambitions and needs of everyone. Things have definitely changed and will keep on changing according to the times.

Today people come to the ashram with an aim or ambition which is not a clear, sattvic aim. They have an ambition to realize something, to become something, or to have an opportunity to express their nature and creativity. We have to think very clearly about what we want to achieve in life. If we have ambitions for power then sannyasa life is definitely not going to work out. If we have other types of ambitions, such as meditating for twenty-four hours a day or doing sadhana whenever we please, that is also not going to work because it is not the ashram's direction to fulfil people's ambitions.

The ashram is a place where opportunities are provided to people for developing immunity from negative tendencies. That is my firm belief and conviction. In order to attain this immunity from the negative, tamasic and rajasic environment, one has to be very clear-headed. Not everyone who wears geru is a perfect being; rather, I feel that people who wear geru sometimes tend to misuse the trust of the guru, the institution and the mission. Geru is only the beginning of a process, which continues on and on for life; it is not an end. I do not become a saint by wearing geru; rather, geru represents the trust placed in me by my guru, hoping that one day I will have the ability to fulfil that trust, to fulfil that mission which he has given me.

The vision of an ashram is immunity and the vision of a sannyasin is transcendence through immunity. In order to

develop this awareness, we have to discover what we need to do in life. There is no doubt that personal ambitions play a very strong role in the ashram because people's ambitions come out here. Negativity also comes out here, but if we have awareness then we can learn how to handle and channel whatever comes out. We come to an ashram with a desire to become, attain or realize something. Then later we may find that the people with whom we are living are often worse than we are. It can happen that, although you are wearing yellow, you feel that you are better than a person who is wearing geru and who has been in the ashram for forty years.

We have to consider the limitations, the ambitions and egos of everyone, and at the same time provide each one with the opportunity of expressing themselves. That is the job of the teacher, and it is a very difficult job, because often there is dependency on the teacher. When the teacher provides a person with an outlet through which their nature can be expressed, other people often react and, due to their limitations, create some crisis or difficulties for that person. The guru or teacher has to manage this, to make an effort to keep everyone happy while they fight among themselves.

An ashram environment provides many opportunities. If you are aware of them then, hopefully, you will not get rusty and mouldy, because you will learn to take every day as a new day of your life, not just as a continuation of the past. Looking back at my sannyasa life, I feel that I have not utilized my full ability or strength. There is so much more that I could do or could have done, but I do not feel rusty or mouldy. However for some people, one day in an ashram can seem like one year, and they become extremely negative about the whole thing. These are the realities of life. When I look at my own life, I feel that in all these years I have gone through a process of learning. I am still learning and will continue to learn, because I am aware of the opportunities an ashram can provide.

First, the ashram provides the opportunity to observe one's interactions with people: whether I react to you positively or

negatively, and how I can handle that reaction to create inner harmony. Second, the opportunity is there to discover how clear-headedness can be maintained, how to keep a clear train of thought and not succumb to the negativity of other people. Third, we can ask of ourselves “What can I do to support and help other people in whatever they are doing?” Fourth, “What are the ways by which I can develop immunity from the effects of karmas, ambitions and ego?” In this way, the ashram can provide many, many opportunities in life to those who want them. It is only a matter of discovering the spirit of the ashram, and one can do this only when one is in tune with, and feels a part of, the environment.

On an organizational level, I am thinking of introducing a system whereby, after completing a few years, swamis leave the ashram for six months or one year to fend for themselves, so that they can learn how to survive in society without being dependent on the ashram or the teacher. Live a normal life and after one year, if the inclination and inspiration continues to be there, then come back for another few years. It often happens that when you are in an environment for some time, you do not appreciate it. You realize what was there only when you leave and return with renewed inspiration. This will not apply to people who are living part-time outside the ashram, such as karma sannyasins who have their own families and jobs, and who have respect for ashram and sannyasa life.

We are very immature in relation to the world. In the confined environment of the ashram we are able to see many things, but in the world there are too many distractions which divert our attention here and there whenever we feel a crisis coming. Outside we can escape from a crisis, but in an ashram we cannot escape, we have to face it. At the same time, however, if sannyasa is to be lived in its true essence, we should not lose touch with the realities that exist outside the ashram gates.

It is important not to lose the inspiration with which we first arrived. The only example I can find of someone who has not lost that original inspiration is Sri Swamiji.

We come with inspiration but then, when we get caught up in the external situations and circumstances, the purity of that inspiration is lost. Maybe the inspiration continues, but it is definitely not pure and does not give us the same strength and stamina to deal with the existing situations and conditions. I became aware of Sri Swamiji's inspiration when he sent a message for the Tyaga Golden Jubilee Convention. The message was: "I still hold dear to my heart and cherish the moment of dedication, fifty years ago, when I surrendered myself to my guru, Swami Sivananda." This shows a mentality which has always remembered the beginning and not the end.

We are always concerned with the result and not with the beginning, or how to go about achieving. If we are students we want a degree to display. If we are sannyasins we also want a degree. What is the difference? The degree becomes our aim, and not the moment of dedication. Remembering that moment of dedication is a very powerful inspiration in itself, because it makes one realize, "I am a seeker on the path, I have many miles to go before I sleep."

Therefore, maintain the original inspiration. That is the effort which I feel every disciple has to make, to remember what the motivation, pull or attraction was which brought them to this path, and how that pull or attraction became a force in their inner life. Only then will you not feel rusty or mouldy.

How can we handle the negative energies of others?

Why do we feel that somebody is abusing us or being negative towards us? Why do we react? The main reason is that the expressions of other people affect and alter our self-image, and as a result we get hurt. When other people express themselves, we react. Whatever the expression is, it alters our self-image and leads to feelings of rejection, negativity, abuse or maltreatment.

Let us look at the subject, not from a traditional yogic viewpoint, but from a different angle. There is a word in

Sanskrit, *swabhava*. *Bhava* means nature or feeling and *swa* means personal or self. If one is aware of one's personal nature, situations of conflict and mental and emotional disturbance can be avoided. Swabhava goes much deeper than the normal understanding of attitude, behaviour, interaction and reaction. Generally, we react to and identify with the external expressions of an individual, not with their real nature or expression. Externally there is a combination of ego, desire, ambition and even strength and weakness, and we are never actually able to observe their real inner state.

Once, in Australia, a swami asked me the very straightforward question, "What is your purpose in coming here?" The sentence carried a tonne of weight behind it because of the size of his body, the loudness of his voice, and the direct manner in which he asked the question. The other swamis were taken aback by the question and I could see the reaction of horror on their faces. Something peculiar happened to my mind at that moment. In that one moment, all the interactions that I had had with that swami since 1976 flashed across my mind like a picture. What came to my mind was the thought that he was not being negative. From my analysis of him in that split second, I was convinced that he still had the heart of a big baby. So, I just gave him a big smile, and replied, "You will find out." Thinking about this interaction now, I realize that I did not listen to his words; rather, I analyzed his swabhava, his nature, and I did not feel there was anything negative or bad, any rejection or apprehension, deep inside him.

One has to realize that the external attitude or behaviour of an individual can always change; it does not reflect the person's real nature. I may rant and rave but do I become that? You may rant and rave, but does your inner being become that? Momentarily it may, but when the wind blows through the top of a tree making it sway wildly, the main trunk remains firm and solid. Therefore, swabhava means becoming aware, observing and knowing what is happening at the deeper level of human nature. If we can have that kind

of understanding, then many of the mental and emotional problems that we face when we encounter difficult situations, when we feel that somebody is attacking us in a negative way, can be avoided.

To have this understanding we must train ourselves, we must work hard upon ourselves. No doubt, while we are at the surface level, we can feel the intensity of the situations and circumstances, the projections of other people towards us. If we climb a tree, we will feel the intensity of the wind blowing and fear that we are going to fall, but if we climb down to the base of the tree the wind will not feel so intense. The same thing applies to our own nature. We live on the surface level all the time, but an effort has to be made to see the reality behind the appearance.

If we look at the theories of yoga, as described in the *Yoga Sutras* for example, we will observe something unique. The systems, concepts, theories and practices of pratyahara that have been described give us the ability to discover our swabhava. The moment we are able to discover it we will be able to understand the swabhava of others also. This definitely will not happen with meditation alone, because even those people who have been practising meditation for many years tend to react very violently in certain situations, with some form of negativity. Why do they have such a reaction? It means that the meditation practice has not given them insight into their own projections and expressions. What is the use of their meditation?

There is a beautiful sequence in pratyahara which covers all these situations. Pratyahara is not withdrawing the mind. It is not concentration. Pratyahara is awareness. How do we become aware? First of all, we have to extend our senses outwards in order to become aware of their reach. That is how pratyahara actually begins. In the first stage of pratyahara, we extend the physical senses out into the environment. Then we become aware of the reactions that happen naturally and spontaneously due to the extension of the physical senses.

In the second stage of pratyahara there is harmonization of the externalized physical senses of the body. In the third stage, we do the same thing with the mental senses, the faculties of cognition, extending them externally and internally. Observing, understanding and harmonizing occur in the fourth stage. In the fifth stage, we become aware of the instinctive reactions, and in the sixth stage, we harmonize them. In the seventh stage, we begin to concentrate the faculties of the physical and mental senses and move into the stage of dharana.

Thus, in order to discover our nature, we harmonize the disturbances which are created within our nature due to the external circumstances, conditions and situations, and then experience or harmonize the states which create the imbalance within us. In this way we can gradually raise ourselves above the influences of negativity

Mental conflict represents an unharmonized state of mind. If the mind is harmonized then there will be no form of mental conflict. Why does the mind become disturbed? The mind becomes disturbed because of the ambitions and aspirations which we all have. The mind becomes disturbed because of the needs that we all have, whether physical, mental, emotional or spiritual. The mind becomes disturbed when we encounter weak areas in our life, some form of mental or emotional disability, even lack of willpower or mental clarity. We have to be very clear in seeing what actually happens, not only in terms of our feelings, desires, ambitions, needs and wants, likes and dislikes, but in relation to the total personality. Through pratyahara it is possible to overcome every kind of mental problem, no matter how difficult it may seem. If we can make a continuous effort then solutions will definitely be found. The choice is ours.

Another method of overcoming negativity and handling the negative energies is through faith. Please do not confuse faith with a mystical or religious concept. Faith is a strength in a human being. If we can recognize faith as a strength and not as something mystical and religious, we will be able to

handle the negative energies. Faith teaches us how to flow with and not struggle against life.

In the language of philosophy, negation is the outcome of our reaction to something. A rotten piece of flesh is put in front of us, we smell it and react. That reaction is a negation of that particular experience and is known as *dvesha*, rejection or repulsion. We smell a nice perfume and we like it. That liking is also a reaction to a smell. If it is a good thing we accept and enjoy it, which is known as *raga*, attraction or attachment. What is similar in both cases? A reaction happens in both of them. One is good, the other is bad. If we live by continuously reacting, then life is definitely going to become hell. We must have the ability to discriminate between positive and negative reactions. To cling to either one of them will limit and bind the forces of the mind by creating a sense of attachment and not allowing the mind to experience total freedom.

Can you discuss the future direction of yoga in relation to this institution?

Our responsibility is not merely to teach yoga or to adopt yoga for our own personal use, but rather to somehow fit the yogic beliefs and practices into modern society. Slowly, opportunities to do this are presenting themselves.

The approach and effort of the first generation of sannyasins was to propagate yoga by teaching whenever possible, establishing small centres and ashrams, and training teachers. The effort of the second generation of sannyasins is not so much to propagate yoga, as to implement what yoga has already offered in a more cohesive and concentrated form. This can only happen when new opportunities present themselves, according to the requirements of society. Bihar Yoga Bharati is going to play a vital role in providing an in-depth understanding of the application of yoga for the direction of the second generation.

The individuals we require to do this kind of work must have certain qualities. There are people from the first generation in whom the yogic inspiration stopped after they

reached the end of their limit, while others adapted themselves easily for the future work. I will not create a distinction between the first and second generations, nor will I make an elite group of the second generation, that has to be avoided.

People should become involved in a very spontaneous way, not with the idea that they belong to the second generation and are therefore better qualified to do the work. There has to be a spontaneous and natural movement from the first to the second generation, it cannot be an individual progression. We have to evolve from one state of yoga to another as a group. We shall try to include those people who have reached the end of their limit, to share their experience and receive their guidance.

Right now I am waiting and watching, because before the work of the second generation starts there have to be a lot of changes. When there is a change of government, the new government brings in new laws and policies, which are necessary for that time and the old policies are placed in the background. Whether in India, Australia, Europe or America, we want to make sure that the people associated with an institution, organization, centre or ashram understand the spirit of both the ashram and of yoga.

It is not our intention to become a big brother who watches everyone. We want to let people know what is available, whether it is in the form of a structural or administrative change, affiliation to the IYFM, standardization of yogic techniques and so on. If we are to be of service for a long time and not die out after the departure of the preceptor, as happens in many organizations, we need to have a basic code of conduct or certain norms which can become the guideline for future generations. What we want for the yoga movement are norms based on common sense in the spirit of service. For example, what is sannyasa, what is yoga, what is an organization? They are three different things, yet we tend to confuse them.

People believe that in order to become yoga practitioners or teachers, they have to adopt a geru robe. That is not

true, but how do you break that mentality? How can we tell people that our yoga life is different to our sannyasa life, and that our sannyasa life is different to our professional or institutional life? There are people who say, “Well, I’ve been told that you should wear geru to practise yoga or when you go out to teach yoga, but the public rejects this because they think it is a cult or some new religion.”

How can we explain to them that sannyasa is a personal affair? You can live in your own home and wear a business suit or pyjamas or just underpants, nobody will care. You can wear geru in your home, but if you go out into the professional field and what you represent is not accepted, then teach yoga in a different way. Do not mix yoga with sannyasa, or with your professional or social identity. Sannyasa is your personal identity and yoga is what you teach.

For those people who are sannyasins in toto, it does not matter whether the public accepts them or not; they know who they are. But some people who wish to adopt yoga as a profession believe that they need sannyasa initiation first. This is a linear approach, moving from first grade to second grade to third grade, and so on. Other systems in the world have adopted a graded approach, so that when you become an adept in one grade you move on to the next.

We do not want yoga to become a linear, sequential process, because it will not work. Sannyasa is very much an individual affair; your profession is a social connection, and yoga is what you offer to other people. Yoga represents an interaction between you and others. Then we have a social identity: I belong to the Bihar School of Yoga tradition, the Swami Sivananda tradition, the Swami Satyananda tradition. Sannyasa, on the other hand is my personal identity.

Another point which comes to mind is the concept of sannyasa. People associate sannyasa with being a renunciate, recluse or monk. This is due to the cultural and religious backgrounds of different communities. Sannyasa is not renouncing or becoming a monk; rather, it is developing an awareness of one’s karmas. There is a beautiful statement in

the *Bhagavad Gita*, “Sannyasa equals investing the karmas.” Nobody has picked up this sentence. When asked to define sannyasa, people open up the scriptures and find long sentences and paragraphs defining it, but nobody says that sannyasa means investment of karmas. In the context in which Krishna was speaking to Arjuna, karma combines *jnana*, wisdom, and *bhakti*, devotion, surrender, or awareness of a higher reality. Sannyasa is actually a way of living in universal harmony by investing your karmas for the growth and development of both your individual being and of the global community.

What you do during your training is a different matter. You can go to the mountains for three, four or five years and do tapasya, or spend time in an ashram, working hard. Sannyasa education is becoming aware of your responses and reactions to different conditions, events, situations, people, mentalities, and so on. In sannyasa education you do not learn how to develop bhakti; that is part of yoga. Sannyasa is a lifestyle. As an investment of karmas, sannyasa simply requires that you understand your responses and reactions to whatever happens, to every event and movement that affects your life, spirit, mind and body.

Ashrams are meant to develop that kind of understanding. The ashram is not a place where you can attain peace and happiness; it is not a utopian place. I remember someone once saying to Sri Swamiji, “This place is like heaven.” Sri Swamiji replied, “This place is not heaven. You go to heaven because of your good deeds and pious acts and you derive pleasure from them, but you do not do that here. The ashram is a place where you exhaust your karmas. You have to allow the negativity to surface; you have to release it. You have to develop a different attitude. You have to understand the lifestyle of a sannyasin. You should let go of your attachments to the karmas; you should invest your karmas. Therefore, an ashram can never be a utopia; it has to be a place of struggle and of personal growth. If the ashram becomes heaven, then it has lost its purpose.”

Ashram education is very much related to sannyasa education. If the ashram becomes a happy, spiritual community, living together comfortably in absolute bliss, then the awareness of human effort and spirituality will be lost. People give me advice, but I know that they do not understand the purpose of an ashram. Einstein would never have followed the advice of a first year physics student attending his first class, because he had his own formulas to pursue and a first year student has a lot of ground to cover.

Most of you are first year students; some have moved into second year, some into third, some into fourth. Some are on the verge of coming out with their certificates and diplomas and degrees. You evolve your own formula, your own understanding of the process. Therefore, certain basic norms are required which can guide us towards gaining full insight and experience of what sannyasa, ashram and yoga are.

The initiation for the second generation will be sankalpa diksha, which has not yet been given to anyone. You can definitely show your commitment, trust, faith and dedication to humanity, guru and God in whatever way you can, and you are free to do so. To become a part of this second wave you will be called either to guide a person, a project, or an area, to become a worker or to connect with other people and groups. However, I prefer to let things evolve in their own time. This is an open secret.



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Swami Niranjanananda was born in Rajnandgaon (Chhattisgarh) in 1960. Guided from birth by his guru, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, he came to live at the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger at the age of four where he received training in yogic and spiritual sciences through yoga nidra. In 1971 he was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa, and for twelve years he lived overseas, acquiring an understanding of different cultures and helping further his guru's mission to spread yoga 'from door to door and shore to shore'.



He returned to India in 1983 to guide the activities of Bihar School of Yoga, Sivananda Math and Yoga Research Foundation at Ganga Darshan. In 1990 he was initiated as a paramahansa sannyasin and in 1993 anointed spiritual preceptor in succession to Swami Satyananda Saraswati. He established Bihar Yoga Bharati, the first university of yoga, in 1994, Yoga Publications Trust in 2000, and a children's yoga movement, Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, in 1995. He travelled extensively to guide seekers around the world until 2009, when he received the command to commence a new phase of sannyasa life.

In 2010, he established Sannyasa Peeth, to enable seekers to experience the spiritual and cultural traditions of India in their essence. The year marked his entry into a phase of higher sadhana and tirtha yatra.

In 2013, he conducted the World Yoga Convention in Munger to celebrate the golden jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga, and launched a new era of yogic renaissance. In 2013 he also commenced the arduous panchagni sadhana. In 2014, he embarked on a Bharat Yatra, an all-India tour, transmitting the gift of yoga to all. Since then, Swami Niranjan has been working to develop the next stage of yogic training and teaching, and has initiated several programs to help people deepen their experience of yoga and imbibe the traditional wisdom. Simultaneously, he has revived various ancient knowledge systems and practices of India.

In 2017, he received the Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian award given by the Government of India, for the outstanding work in the field of yoga.

Author of many classic books on yoga and other spiritual streams, Swami Niranjan is a magnetic source of wisdom on all aspects of yogic philosophy, practice and lifestyle. He ably combines tradition with modernity as he continues to work for his guru's mission.



SATYANANDA YOGA
BIHAR YOGA

On the Wings of the Swan series consists of discourses and satsangs given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati during the eighties and nineties.

These early teachings, presented in their original question and answer format, contain a wealth of wisdom applicable to all yogic aspirants seeking guidance and inspiration for living a harmonious life. A yogi from birth, Swami Niranjan's approach combines practicality, empathy, compassion, warmth, humour and penetrating insight. No matter what the question, Swami Niranjan lends it an ease unique to him, bringing together an ancient spiritual tradition and an understanding of the current way of life. With each answer, he takes us right into the heart of the matter and provides a fresh perspective on it.

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ISBN :978-93-81620-25-0